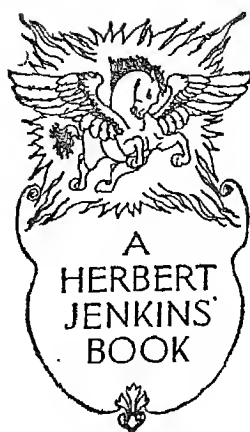


DISTANT HORIZONS

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ALL THAT VIVID LIFE AND COLOUR GOING ON WITHOUT ME

CHAPTER I

PRELUDE TO TRAVEL

IT was all the fault of the spring. A job had come to an end and instead of regretting it an insistent little devil inside me was whispering, "You are free—you are free!" And all my dreams came flooding back again. I was consumed with the fierce impatience of youth. At that time my longing to travel was almost a mania. The vivid posters of shipping companies conjured up pictures that were fast becoming intolerable.

For two years in college I had scraped and saved to make one vacation possible. Then I had gone with a guide over the Yukon trail, up the Mackenzie River, right the way to Dawson City. I had come back with arms of steel from real hard paddling, and had learnt the ways of dogs and men in the Frozen North. But it was colour I wanted. The tropics and the sun. To see bananas growing and date palms and orange trees; to see elephants and giraffes and vivid blue seas and camels in a row against a desert sky; to tread forbidden cities and face the hidden terrors of the jungle. Nothing could offer half the terror I felt when I contemplated reaching the age of thirty before doing any of these things. With only five more years to go the responsibilities and distractions of thirty seemed a veritable "Wall of China" over which I should never climb to my desires unless I started "Now."

As I sat in a corner of the drug store the colours of the bottles reflected in the mirrors became beautiful "sarongs" worn by lovely brown maidens; the tracings on the glass became palm-trees; the tinkling of ice in

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the shaker, the tinkle of mule-bells between the banana plantations, as a whole world marched before my eyes,

Two men got down from their stools, paid their bill, and went out through the swing door. Their conversation had been so much in line with my thoughts that it was only gradually that I became aware of my surroundings again. They were civil engineers who had the furthest corners of the earth as their workshops. Their talk ranged from Afghanistan roads, where the labour troubles were caused by snipers, to irrigation schemes in Australian deserts, where the surveying was done on camels. I could see them in imagination sitting on high stools in Charley's or Victor's or Maxim's, in Sunflower Sam's or on the terrace at Shepherd's in Cairo—talking fascinating "shop" in all the famous cities of the world.

Backwards and forwards in my mind went two lines of Robert Louis Stevenson: "I should like to rise and go, where the golden apples grow." I found myself saying it out loud—"I should like to rise and go! I should like to rise and go!" only to discover the waiter at my side with a deprecating smile and the bill.

A girl was kicking an impatient satin shoe against the counter. A man leant across, but neither spoke. They had used up whatever conversation they had. Her smoke-rings rose up to the shining rows of bottles. He, too, was smoking. Their obvious boredom only increased my impatience to get away from all ordinary things. It was past closing time, and I had fed only on my dreams. But marching solemnly back to my empty flat to the tune of "I should like to rise and go, where the golden apples grow!" I decided that I was going to travel—somehow.

Three days later I was dancing to the same tune. Down ten flights of dusty stairs—ignoring the chromium-plated lift—two steps at a time, I was singing out loud, "I should like to rise and go!" In my

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pocket was a contract guaranteeing all reasonable expenses for a three months' tour of the Far East. In my ears were ringing the Editor's final words: "What I want is colour, romance, excitement—get off the beaten track, and send us back something good." A useful cheque was in my pocket and joy in my heart. Deep down inside me I was thinking furiously of those reasonable expenses. Unreasonably small. By hook or by crook that three months I was determined should spread to six months, to a year, to two years! I had broken loose. I wasn't going to be tied down again so easily. I would work my way, paint my way, write my way; if necessary, beg my way—from America back to America—right across the world!

Right down the side of my atlas at school I had made a list of the countries I would see when I was older. The only thing I can't understand is why I left any out at all. But now I should be able to put a red stroke through many of the names. At long last I had started on my list. No longer would it torment me to think of all that vivid life and colour actually going on whilst I only dreamt of it, as it had tormented me on many a summer afternoon when the hum of insects had laid an emphasis on stillness and the laziness of golden days had slipped slowly away, and that other life had gone on without me.

My first inclination was to rush round to the great offices of the travel agencies I had haunted for years. I felt that I owed them something for the free folders that had fed my imagination. I had seen myself in a hundred dreams marching in and buying a ticket for Paradise, amid the envious nudgings and whisperings of the assembled clerks.

Reality was different—but even more exciting. An impatient journey to Vancouver. Then a dingy office in a back street by the Harbour produced a ticket on a freighter calling at Yokohama, Port Arthur and Taku.

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The destination of the first boat sailing that week made my decision for me. I had been wallowing in atlases all the way across the continent, but had despaired of plans. The bewildering choice, with half the world at my disposal, left me dithering hopelessly.

Sunset on the fiords of Vancouver gave a foretaste of colours. In the galley the Chinese cook sang a strange Oriental melody. I was the only passenger—three being the maximum accommodated on the small boat—and I had the freedom of the ship. My good fortune was not appreciated sufficiently until many months later. Then, as deck-hand on one vessel, in the crowded steerage of another, and as deck-passenger with fifty fellow passengers, I appreciated to the full the good fortune on that first trip. The boat chugged away across the North Pacific. I rested a little, read a little, thought a lot, enjoyed an amazing quantity of good food, and listened to the Russian captain's stories of typhoons in the China Sea.

I was undoubtedly the most enthralled listener that captain ever had. Even when his repertoire was exhausted and I began to recognize the same stories again, I was still content to listen. I was on my way—nothing else mattered.

CHAPTER II

OVERTURE IN JAPANESE

IT was the cook who woke me. "You are wanted on deck," he said. I stared and rubbed my eyes, but I was up on deck in a very short space of time. It was only six o'clock as I climbed up the companion way. The sun shone already. The air was clear as crystal. The captain's eyes were twinkling. "Go straight ahead."

I went forward and looked out on the shining sea. It was very beautiful, but—and then I saw it.

I had been about to turn back—a little suspicious of the twinkle in the captain's eyes—when I suddenly realized that the blue expanse above me was not just empty sky. In it was a beautiful mountain in a white dress. Severed from the earth below—held up as by a picture cord—was a great white pyramid of snow. A hundred miles away, thousands of feet up in the air, Fujiyama hung suspended, secret and still.

For nearly an hour I watched. For nearly an hour we sailed on over the glistening sea. Then a group of dancing fishing-boats took my eye. As I looked up Fujiyama was vanishing in the morning haze. Without movement or shadow it just faded away.

We sailed into the Bay of Tokyo. At the foot of its wooded hills my dreams faded away. We were in a busy modern harbour. The vessels at anchor were flying the flags of the world; tugs and panting launches rushed to and fro; sirens called urgently; the rattle of pneumatic drills from a shipyard sounded like machine guns; blast furnaces on shore belched clouds of smoke; dozens

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of great oil-tanks, looking like aluminium gasometers, clustered the shore ; the heavy rattle of a great dredger dripping mud from clanking iron jaws helped to make up a lively introduction to modern Japan. While my thoughts had been drawn irresistibly onwards, by the sight of the sacred mountain, to the old Japan of legend and poetry, of Buddhistic calm, of beauty and romance, my ears met the clamour and noise of a great dockyard, and my eyes met the wireless masts, electric cranes, pylons and aeroplanes of the New Japan.

We arrived at Yokohama to the minute, and were wharfed into a concrete pier. Electric cranes swung over the side of the boat with an expectant look and the decks were cleared for action. Then came my introduction to the other Japan. The sturdy dock labourers lining the wharf were, without exception, smiling. Dressed in the native style—loose cotton tunics and black trunks—this excited happy throng were Japanese in their native element.

An hour later I was sitting back in a luxurious taxi, smoking one of the captain's cigars. They were nearly as strong as his stories. We speeded along a modern road—the water-front avenue—flanked by ultra-modern business houses and banks ; then through what looked more like an enormous village than a city. Small wooden bungalows stretched for miles. Trams, cars, lorties, cyclists and push carts filled the streets. Women in kimonos sauntered by, the huge bows tied behind them often crowned by the smiling brown baby which peered over their shoulders. A sudden shower of rain brought out hundreds of flowered parasols to brighten the grey roofs and the endless monotony of those dismal little bungalows.

Then the village became gay with advertisements, sky-signs, traffic lights and open shop-fronts full of colour. Fewer bungalows and more stone buildings appeared. Then came whole streets of modern stone

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and concrete. We were anywhere again—Toronto, Birmingham, Berlin—any big city ; but this was Tokyo. The climax came with the waiting doorman of the hotel. Gold braid and brass buttons—the badge of his clan the world over—ushered us into its elegant walls, where a mixed motif of Japanese architecture in the dining-room was the only sign of an almost completely suppressed Japan. French cooking was served after American cocktails by a German waiter, to the echoes of African dance music.

It was the captain's choice, not mine. He had offered me a lift and a meal, and I had gratefully accepted. Actually nothing could have been newer or grander or more modern, and normally nothing would have riled me more as an introduction to Japan.

But to the captain this was very familiar country. Slowly, as we had travelled swiftly along the twenty-mile road, I had begun to realise that I was covering ground that had suffered the worst calamity in the world. As the captain pointed this way and that, as his voice rose in excitement, I realized that here was his biggest story, where no exaggeration was possible.

He pointed out the Bluff, where the American Hospital had stood. When the great earthquake of Saturday, September 1st, had come out of a blue sky, the whole building had been thrown headlong down the hillside into a cemetery already gaping with great chasms where the ancient dead and the new dead were swallowed up in fresh upheavals.

We passed Yokohama Park, where forty thousand people had found refuge, only safe—even in that great space—because the burst water-mains had flooded it and kept the terrible fire at bay. We crossed over the Momen Bridge, scene of a ghastly tragedy. High winds had swept the flames on to the buildings near, hemming in the bridge. A whirlpool of smoke and flames had rushed over the bridge and gathered the hundreds of

people on it in one vast embrace. As the wind cleared the smoke away, the bridge was seen to be on fire. The people could not run. Tightly packed, they had jostled each other in desperation. The captain's description made my blood run cold.

"I can never forget it," he said; "I don't believe that even death itself will wipe my memory clean. At last the blackened skeleton of the bridge fell into the stream, carrying its load of dead. I got back to Yokohama after a nightmare journey, and found my ship had been caught in the area of flaming oil from the great tanks on shore and had gone to the bottom."

Children like animated bouquets were playing in a great square as we rode along. "Thirty thousand people took refuge there," whispered the captain. "Every one was suffocated as they stood."

After that the modern ugliness of the city did not depress me as it would have done. I had been introduced to a City Risen from the Ashes. I only marvelled at the completeness of the rising. It was the imagination that had to see the ruins and the desolation. There were few signs left for the eye to see.

A group of boys were playing "tag" or "touch" in an open place between the buildings. The unheeding shouts of Young Japan echoed over the waste. A drooping pair of rusty iron gates hung just as the doomed inhabitants of the old city had left them in their headlong flight. Mostly, however, all was order and the drab monotony of newness.

But it was colour and romance I wanted—not memories—and I only had four days in Japan. Unless, of course, I could let the boat go on to China without me, and that was unthinkable extravagance. So I left the captain in that tiresome, un-Japanese atmosphere, surrounded by cigar smoke and a sheaf of official papers, sneaked out of a side entrance, and hailed a passing rickshaw.

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For the first time I felt that I was in Japan. It was cosy in that little cart, with its quiet wheels and upholstered interior. I slipped off my rucksack and leant back in luxury of a different kind. We bumped and bounced our way across tramlines and through the puddles, edging a dangerous course through all the traffic. The posters on the station wall slipped past. The boy dropped his handles with more thought for my train than my dignity, and ran me up the stairs. I huddled into a queue for a third-class ticket to Nikko, and then he led the way to the platform through the crowds. He took my tip and my thanks with smiling dignity. He was still smiling as the train steamed out.

That famous and inimitable smile of Japan followed me on to the train. It was a combination of dignity, sincerity and sheer merriment that I was to meet often, but which never failed to astonish me afresh. Even the train attendants smiled wonderfully in profound gratitude—for being allowed to inspect my ticket. At each station as we paused—I followed the route on a small timetable taken from a rack in the hotel lounge—I heard the persistent call of "Bento! Bento! BENTO!" The first time I thought it was the name of the station. I leant out of the window, showed my ticket to the guard and said "Nikko?" "" he replied reassuringly, thus completing my first conversation in Japanese. At the next call of "Bento!" I watched from the window. All along the train men and women were leaning out. I saw them hand fifty sen to the crier and receive a Bento box, so at the next stop I tried one.

It was a dainty little box of thin wood in two parts, with a teapot and cup attached. One side contained hot rice, the other held a cutting of omelette, some lotus roots, bamboo shoots and pickled seaweed. At least, that was the nearest guess I could make. It was an immaculate and very tasty little parcel. The teapot was a tiny affair of very cheap earthenware, but it was an

"objet d'art" in everything except price. Many travellers, native and foreign, collect them. Each station has a different design. I sent half a dozen of them home—two I had used, and four of different designs that I rescued from being swept up with the rubbish by the train boy.

The girl from whom I bought my "bento" raised a demure head, crowned with glistening hair piled in the ancient fashion. Her round face, with a rosy dash of rouge showing through the pallid dust of rice-powder, broke into a smile that a film-star would have envied. I nearly jumped out of the train, but the window was too small and the door too far away. The train rolled away.

As it rolled steadily on its way we began to climb upwards. Steep hills aflame with autumn colours appeared. Maples, blazing with rich and delicate shades of red, vied with the gloom of giant cryptomeria, thirty feet round and a hundred feet high. A frieze of Old Japan—a woodland stream, with bridge and water-wheels and bright figures of butterfly maidens, seemed too much like a painting to be real. But the figures moved and the stream ran; the twisted pines shook with the evening breeze, and the water-wheels turned. It was only I that dreamt.

I walked up the village street in the dusk. It seemed to be an endless street bordered with dolls' houses. The great thirty-mile Memoriam Avenue with its twenty thousand trees stretched away to the limits of the fading light. The place was almost deserted. I was a million miles away from anyone I knew. At last I was in Japan. Out of doors there was not a sound. All the people were making ready for the religious festival on the morrow. New lamp-posts had been set up—each with its Shinto canopy, its decorations of chrysanthemums and vivid maple leaves. Strips of paper prayers were fluttering in the light of huge paper lanterns.

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Then I came to a crowd. In front of a street altar a portable shrine was being built by the parish and dozens of small kimonoed boys swarmed round with eager faces, dancing about in expectation of to-morrow's good time.

The rest of the street was deserted. I walked along like a spy, seeing the private life of Japan silhouetted behind paper walls. The lighted shop-fronts and open rooms showed picture after picture of family life. It was the evening hour when everything became more personal and individual. Families gathered round low tables for their evening meal, or stooped low over some home labour, making kites and toys or sewing little quilted coats for the winter ahead. Brown men and women, girls and boys sat talking, their unheard lips moving like puppets behind pale paper windows, while the barrels of oranges, glistening sacks of rice, piles of tiny glass bowls full of gold fish, and the varied wares of a dozen shops sent me zigzagging across the road to catch a glimpse of each exciting interior in turn.

A little figure in grey kimono came clattering along behind me on wooden sandals. It was a little boy of perhaps seven or eight, with coal black eyes in a smiling face as round as a cherub's. He gazed at me in silence. I asked him in English for the nearest inn. His smile broadened. I made signs, resting my head on my folded hands—an international sign for sleep. He went ahead and turned back with another smile, so I followed him. We turned away from the main street a little way, then he pushed back a sliding panel in the high fence and disappeared. A moment—then a little round head peeped out, and I stepped into a garden. A lantern, hung in a leaning pine tree, guided us down the path to the front of the inn. There was a silvery tinkle of water in the darkness. My little guide smiled a farewell and disappeared into the garden again on his way home. I was left standing in the porch of my first

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Japanese inn without the vaguest notions of what to do.

But our footsteps had been heard. Like the drawing of a curtain, sliding doors with paper windows moved apart. Two doll-like figures, with the coloured bows of their obis bright against a background of polished wood and lacquered screens, stood at the entrance. The girls knelt, bowing their foreheads to the ground, miraculously without disturbing their black swan's-breast coiffures. I stood on the path and bowed—a little awkwardly, I fear. I raised my foot to cross the threshold but four hands were raised in horror. They pointed. I took off my shoes and put on a pair of "pushers" lying on the step, then I shuffled after them along a corridor with paper walls into an enormous room.

A portion of the floor was pointed out as mine, including a number of "mats." As I watched, four paper walls were set up in grooves. I had a room. There was a smooth cushion on the floor, a low brazier in a polished wooden case glowing with warmth from its charcoal centre, a little pile of quilts in a corner, and all was complete. My hostesses bowed themselves out. I knelt back on my heels on the cushion and looked around.

The door slid back, a little housemaid appeared. Again a low bow. Behind her was another girl. They knelt in front of me and handed me a dainty bowl of tea and two little cakes. They watched closely for my approval, then, all smiles, they filled the bowl again. That over, they handed me a quilted kimono of silk. "Bath?" said one. I nodded, although the invitation was more like a command. They walked to the door and clapped their hands while I started to undress. Then they turned back into the room again. I stopped disrobing, with my shirt half over my head. I looked round, a bit startled. No-one had warned me. With charming smiles they misunderstood—in fact, were

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incapable of understanding—my hesitation, and rushed forward to help me. With the most natural air in the world they helped me off with my shirt and stood, one each side, until I had finished undressing and was safely tucked into a rather abbreviated kimono.

Through many passages they led me to the bath. In the bathroom were two square wooden tanks full of steaming hot water. In one sat a Japanese gentleman. He rose as I entered with the two girls and bowed. His only embarrassment lay in the fact that he was unable to carry out the salutations prescribed by a rigid etiquette. So he contented himself with a bow and a smile and sat down again. One of the girls tripped daintily across and started to scrub his back.

The other "Ne-san" waited patiently for me to disrobe, smiling encouragingly from time to time. Then she filled a dipper from the bath and held it out. I felt the temperature—just right. She then splashed the hot water on to a low stool, motioned me to sit down, splashed more water over me, handed me a piece of soap, and slipped quietly out. Thoroughly soaped, I stepped gingerly into the bath. But the water was a bit too hot for my white skin. The Japanese parboil themselves, but it took me several minutes to ease my body into that tank, to the good-natured amusement of the Japanese gentleman and his back-scrubber. Twenty minutes of delicious soaking followed, punctuated by polite grimaces. The little maidservant rolled up the sleeves of her kimono and scrubbed my back thoroughly. Then she went out, but in a moment or two both girls returned. I crawled reluctantly out and was handed a towel about two feet square. I gazed at it in despair. When that was soaked I received another, and then another, until, miraculously, I was dry.

Soothed and refreshed, I padded back to my room, feeling the cool smoothness of the rush sandals grateful to my feet. Food was brought in on a beautiful

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lacquer tray, each dish having its own little lacquer bowl. There was noodle soup, some beef with rice and mushrooms, a little omelette, fruits and sweet cakes. Everything was served by a little waiting maid and everything came in the reverse order—the sweets first, then the fruits, on to the soup. Then with some ceremony came several tiny cups of “sake,” the native rice beer. The maid and her assistant gave me their whole attention. They turned to each other with happy remarks, of which I understood nothing, but they laughed, and I laughed too. Notwithstanding its topsy-turviness and strangeness, I thoroughly enjoyed that meal.

My bed was dragged out to the middle of the room. The quilts were piled on the floor. I was offered the usual wooden pillow, shaped like a headman's block. They went into peals of laughter at the face I made, and rolled an extra quilt into a pillow for me instead. So, tired out, I got into the pocket of the final quilt and was buttoned up in that for the night, and left alone at last. The only thing they didn't do was to kiss me good night.

Despite all that it was some time before I fell asleep. The place resounded all the night through. Certain things were screened from my eyes, but not from my ears. At first came every known human noise, and then weird creakings and groanings and sharp crackles from rush mats and paper walls in a crescendo of ghostliness, but I slept at last.

I awoke early next morning with a strange feeling of urgency. I got out of my quilts and stood up. There it was again. For a moment or two I felt my heart stop beating, and a strange sensation came over me. It was as though I had had a heart attack. Surely I hadn't started on my travels after all these years of waiting only to find that I was a heart case? But I looked up—the lamp was swinging in slow circles

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above my head. Then I knew. It was a slight earthquake. The blood rushed back to my face in my relief. It wasn't my heart, thank God! There was another and fainter wave, but I was ready. I saw it move the lamp again, and again felt the uncanny sensation of an attack of vertigo. In my relief I forgot to be alarmed.

If it hadn't been that the movement of other people so early showed me that I was not alone in feeling the shock, I should have passed it off as a dream. But nobody said a word, and I got no chance to ask.

I clapped my hands. The little maid appeared kneeling at the panel door and bowing her head to the floor. While I dressed, dainty little housemaids drifted in at most embarrassing moments and went smiling through. Two little maids walked in with a tiny table and a dozen covered dishes. I squatted happily on the floor for a time, but before the meal was over I was reduced to wriggling about most uncomfortably. First one foot then the other went to sleep.

I had been preening myself in the blue silk of the kimono, although there wasn't a mirror to be seen. I abandoned it with regret, and put off my soft sandals. Clad in the incongruous garments of a yesterday already centuries away, I left amid the seven bows of farewell and the echoes of a lingering cry of "Sayonara," for the temples of Nikko.

Out in the broad avenue again, I made my way down the hill. It was early. But it was a holiday, and the converging lanes, lined with booths and side-shows, were thronged with people. I became familiar with a rare kind of personal solitude. Not only was I one of a crowd—always a lonely sort of affair when you are with them but not of them—but I was bereft of the use of my tongue because my language was not theirs, and of my ears, too, because their language was not mine. In addition there were differences of colour, race, dress

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and features that confined my experiences to what my eyes could see. What a sight it was that I saw, with eyes made sharper by the impotence of my other senses !

The roads were crowded with men, women and children in the gayest of moods. Rows of paper lanterns decorated the booths. Professional storytellers already had their groups of thrilled disciples. I set out in earnest to "do" some of the side-shows. Each had its own "barker" and its own way of baiting the crowd. The fronts of the tents were raised. A fleeting glimpse could be caught of a beautiful tight-rope dancer swaying above the crowd already inside, or it might be a troupe of actors. A brief glimpse. Down came the tent flap, leaving the crowd outside to decide whether ten sen were well spent in seeing the rest of that tantalizing show. I was content with glimpses of the various entertainments, until I came to a miniature Circus. Inside there was a long narrow stage and on that narrow platform a whole family—grandfather, grandmother, sons and daughters and little roly-polys of children performed miraculous feats of acrobatics and dancing. Then they covered their tights with gorgeous silken robes and mystified us with their magic—a marvel of skill and cleverness.

I turned aside and climbed a steep pathway up and up amidst lovely groves of dark trees to the most beautiful shrines in Japan. But first I crossed the tumultuous Daiya River, and saw the famous red-lacquered Memorial Bridge that none but the Emperor himself may cross.

It was a slow and dignified climb up the lichen-covered staircase. The size of the age-mellowed stones made anything else impossible. The final two hundred steps up the mountain-side led to a simple bronze sepulchre where I rested, surrounded by silence and the tree tops. I stayed for an hour.

Then a bell tolled. There was a solemn beat of

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drums. The distant strains of music startled me with their vague menacing mutterings. I felt a puny atom perched naked on a high rock, and Gods and Goddesses, Heavens and Hills, seemed suddenly potent and real. The music grew louder—the drums were insistent in their calling. I started hurriedly down—but the great steps prevented anything so undignified. I went slowly down, step by step, to a great open space.

A great bell was being rung by a Buddhist priest in stiff white garments. I stood still. The sacred gates were swung back and a procession emerged. I followed them with my eyes as they went along by the side of the Thousand People Steps. The thunder of the drums was deafening as they passed me. Hundreds of golden spear-heads led the way. Then came a Great Dragon, with a hundred undulating legs, followed by men in ancient green robes on horseback. Priests in blue and yellow robes of silk—more dragons—three sacred white horses, proud necks bent and black hooves prancing high—companies of bowmen—Samurai with swords and fans—sacred banners, carried proudly on palanquins—a huddle of priests in yellow and musicians playing under their parasols, with a huge drum nearly drowning the wild and unmelodious music. Then, carried on the shoulders of a hundred men, came a great platform of red lacquer hung with streamers. On it were Geisha girls and musicians playing mournful flutes. The quality of the music improved, to my Western ears, as it faded into the distance.

All day I wandered through a maze of temples, gates and shrines set in majestic groves of trees. It was a vast open air temple in which thousands and thousands of worshippers could be lost as though in a forest. The converging lines of men and women visited first the shrine of the God, to give him greeting. They smiled as they prayed. Then they flocked back to see the many processions, to laugh and to joke with no

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impairment of their sincerity of faith. The enclosures in the near vicinity of the public shrines are always places of festival and light. The worshippers plunge straight into the lively activities of a sort of Lunar Park after their tribute. Tea-houses, often gay and questionable, are found conveniently near temple grounds.

But that I found out afterwards. For hours I had eyes for nothing but the temples. I entered more than twelve of them. Only an unshod foot could tread those sacred floors. So at each temple I had to undo my shoes and enter in my stockinged feet. The gilded images seated in the gloom, the enchantment of the red lacquered corridors and columns, the fantastic architecture, the great gongs, the weird prayer drums, and the quiet priests, in yellow or white robes of silk, reading their prayer scrolls, combined to conjure up a fantastic picture of a day I can never forget, but which will always have the quality of a dream.

Huge bronze gongs, smaller golden gongs and all the temple bells vibrated in the air. The afternoon processions were starting. I felt in my pocket for the last of the apples I had been munching. It had gone—probably I had eaten it and forgotten. My stomach cried out for food and I turned and hurried to the village. A refreshment booth supplied my wants. While I ate a vegetable soup of some kind from a lacquered bowl, a delicious omelette was being prepared in an iron dish over a charcoal brazier. Around me were family groups of pilgrims. They expressed their enjoyment of their soup by lip-smacking and drawing in the fluid between their teeth with great gusto. I learnt later that such noises were the customary polite expressions of approval of the dish. I must have disappointed several Japanese cooks before I learnt to do the same.

The sun was still fairly high when I left Nikko for a tramp to the next village, or perhaps the next but one,

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if the light held out. I was determined to spend a night in another Japanese inn before returning to the ship. My lonely mood of the morning I left behind me with the crowds. One smile, one Japanese smile anyhow, and I was completely at home in the strange country-side I marched through. The main road glistened white as it crossed canal after canal. There were lanes, but none formed of hedges, although shade trees abounded. The low-roofed houses looked as though a gale would blow them away, but the many blue tiles, weathered to a mellow old age, gave them an air of serene gravity. In the fields and orchards, the stocky figures of women and girls worked steadily. The white teeth shone in the *'round, pleasant, sunburned faces as they turned their heads to watch me pass.* Strapped to the hips of many of them, or nestled in the folds of the maternal kimonos, were little naked babies looking out on a pleasant world with profound amusement. I listened to the raftsmen calling to each other from raft to raft as they poled their load of tree-trunks along the canal. I could hear the clack of hoes and the women talking along the rows. But something was missing. I was miles down the road before I realized that the country sounds of cattle—sheep baaing, pigs grunting, cows lowing : even the cluck of hens was missing. Even horses were seldom to be seen. The scene was alive, but almost silent. It stood peacefully in the setting sun.

CHAPTER III

C R E S C E N D O

WITHOUT any warning the silence of the cedar trees was broken by the clang of a great bell. The notes went singing down along the avenues as though they would never end. The first note had not begun like an ordinary bell. It had risen swiftly in volume and died away more slowly than seemed possible.

I moved to the open space between the trees and saw that it was a priest who had rung the bell. He wore robes as white as the temple gates, but the gloom in the temple hid his face. But I caught a glimpse of his movements. His raised hands were clasped as though he prayed to the bell. He was only holding the clapper while the iron giant above him hummed and vibrated. I waited for him to ring again, but as the last notes died he turned on his heel and vanished through a lacquered doorway. I was disappointed.

The other side of the avenue of trees, which I had crossed to see the temple, was lined with great and dark old houses. The road into the small town led straight between the trees for a quarter of a mile before it bent round and up a hill. Behind me marched a Japanese policeman in his white uniform and long sword. To his smile and greeting I had answered with a pleasant "Good evening!" In front of me was a rickshaw-boy trotting back to the town with empty carriage. Behind him again, a man in a broad-brimmed hat and blue smock clattered along on noisy wooded "getas."

Suddenly there was a yell that startled me nearly out of my wits. The shafts of the empty rickshaw went flying

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into the air. The rickshaw boy ran for dear life to the nearest tree and swarmed up it like a monkey. The slow clatter of the "getas" of the man behind him took on a sudden note of urgency as their owner flew to the gate of the nearest house. He was over in a flash. I stared in amazement. Then the blood froze in my veins. I was rooted to the ground for a second or two, for down that quiet road came a horrible apparition. A large yellow mongrel was loping along like a wolf with the foam hanging from his lips and dribbling behind him. Mad dog! With all the horrors of hydrophobia vivid in my mind, I made a wild leap for the nearest gate. Over in a second, I made a further leap to the balcony of the house and hung on to the rail panting from exertion and excitement. From the road outside came an unearthly yell. Then silence. Craning my neck I was just in time to see the policeman whip out the long sword at which I had been inclined to smile a few minutes before. One swipe. The head of the luckless mongrel rolled in the road. The blood spurted from his body.

At that moment the door panel slid back. Framed in the doorway was a very old woman. She bowed to me as I clung to the balcony, stooping so low that her head went lower than her knees. It was an effort for her to look up, but when she did so she was smiling. I climbed down and returned her bow. Then I pointed to the road. She peered, but her old eyes could not take in the scene. She clapped her hands. A group of bright butterflies came out on to the balcony, bowing low. What a chattering followed! Then my eye caught a sign in the window, looking like an apartment house notice. Painted in white letters on a polished panel, it said: "Miss Kona, Resident Interpreter."

I pointed to the sign. The old lady nodded and spoke to one of the chattering girls, who disappeared with a giggle. Rush sandals were produced and my heavy

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walking shoes came off. Before I could recover from my surprise I was inside the house. In vain I protested. I didn't know whether the possession of a resident interpreter meant that this was an inn or a seminary attached to the temple opposite, or what it could be. Anyhow I was in it, whatever it was, and I was quite ready for anything that might come from this strange introduction. Marching along with surprising agility, the old lady led me to the foot of the staircase at the end of the passage. With a low bow and a friendly gabble of strange words, she invited me to follow her.

I was directed to a panelled alcove in a little room on the first floor, given a sitting-mat and left to my own devices. The parchment walls were divided into little oblongs of wooden frames. I was examining the room and its only piece of furniture, a low black table that shone like a mirror, when there were footsteps along the corridor. One of the oblong panels slid back. Framed in the doorway thus made was a beautiful olive-skinned girl, on her knees, forehead to the ground.

Announcing herself in a soft clear voice as "O Kona San," she rose and entered the room. She sank down on a silken knee-pad in front of me with not the slightest trace of diffidence or shyness. She spoke English remarkably well. She smiled at the story of my precipitate arrival, and took it quite for granted that I would stay the night. The house I had so unceremoniously invaded was a "machiai"—had been, in fact, for over a hundred years and always in the same family. She found it difficult to find an English equivalent for "machiai," but this was evidently one of the houses of pleasure which in Japan gravitate near to the temples. In the rich history of this house the dancing girls of Japan had been used to entertaining foreigners, but few foreigners now visited the lonely house in the trees. The velvety slanting eyes of O Kona San were soft as she thanked me for the best English conversation she had ever enjoyed.

CRESCENDO

It was not until she made a little movement signifying her intention of departing that I realized that we had been talking for nearly an hour. Never before had my thoughts and my lightest expressions of opinion been so flatteringly received. Every phrase and every charming gesture had been a subtle tribute to my importance as a male and as a member of another race. When I praised her command of English she murmured, "I am pleased beyond measure!" and apologized for such a long prelude to my evening, and departed.

My next visitor was the bath-boy.

"Bath!" he commanded, grinning all over. "Lovely bath!" he added, determined to get full value out of the few words he had learnt from the resident interpreter. I nodded, followed him to the room to which I was assigned, quickly undressed and placed my folded clothes in the cupboard he showed me. With a clean kimono wrapped round me—a red one this time—I followed him down to the cellars of the house. The room was full of steam. The same democratic bath-house. This one had two baths in it—baths to stand up in, entered by steps clear in the fresh hot water. They were heated by charcoal fires underneath, worked by foot-bellows.

Roaring with delight, the bath-boy splashed the hot water over a wooden bench. Taking a large cake of soap in his hands he splashed more water over me and soaped me till I looked like a snow-man. Then he stood me in the corner like a naughty boy while he threw panniers of tepid water over me, followed by a cold one that made me jump. He led me over to the nearest bath. It was scalding hot. I got one foot on the first step but could get no further. "Too hot!" I said. He grinned, put his hand right in up to the elbow, like a nurse trying the bath-water for a child. With great vigour he applied himself to the foot-bellows until the air steamed again. "Too hot!" I yelled again, hoping

that mere noise might help his understanding. He pumped again.

In the middle of the excitement the door opened. In walked a smiling O Kona San. My kimono was hanging by the door she had entered, so I had to stand there naked, perched on the side of the high bath, and explain the situation. She came forward with no slightest trace of embarrassment and felt the water for herself. "Just warm enough for a Japanese," she said judicially, "but a trifle hot for you perhaps." Anyway, she turned on to the bath-boy and scolded him vigorously, sending him out of the room. Then she felt the water in the second bath. "Just right for you," she said; "try it." So I stepped over the low parapet between the baths—put there, not for privacy, but merely as a leaning place for gossipers—and tried the other bath. By edging in a little at a time I gradually got acclimatized and was in up to my arm-pits.

Meanwhile, Miss Kona, having hung up her kimono on a hook she could only just reach, had climbed up the steps into the first tub with a soft gurgle of sheer delight. Over the edge of the little parapet she looked at me with great amusement. The dark lashes lay almost upon the oval cheeks, which had a reddish tint from the heat of the bath that looked lovely with that pale olive complexion. The rosy glow of her body contrasted favourably with my own beetroot colour. The steam ascended in separate clouds, rolling round the ceiling and condensing on the wooden walls.

"Do not do that, Mr. Shreve!" called out O Kona San warningly, as I moved back up a step to avoid some of the heat. "Get right in—up to your chin—then you won't feel it so much." I felt the lobes of my ears burning, but it was certainly better so. I began to enjoy it. From the other bath came a gurgle of laughter. "Very healthy—very healthy!" said a smooth voice through the steam. Bowing in reply, I burned my

nostrils and straightened up again quickly. O Kona San laughed consolingly. She told me that hardly anyone got scalded to death, but I wasn't so sure. As if to prove it she clapped her hands; the bath-boy came back with a bundle of towels—large ones this time. At her bidding he hastened to blow up the bellows. He wanted to blow up mine, too, but I wasn't having any more. Gingerly I hoisted myself out. Wrapped in a bath-towel I sat on the bench while the bath-boy massaged each part of my body in turn.

A very demure O Kona San supervised the girls who brought food into my room a little later, so for the first time I got an idea of what really was the basis of some of the meals I had eaten. Despite this, I thoroughly enjoyed the meal, refusing only one dish—some strips of raw fish on glass skewers. A dish I should have enjoyed in any case was a local delicacy—grilled eels—but it was intriguing to guess at some of the dishes before the resident interpreter "blew the gaff." I should have drawn the line at one delicacy she apologised for not being able to serve. That was a dish of small fish that are eaten not merely raw but alive. Dragged by their tails through a saucer of spiced sauce, they meet a sad end in the mouths of epicures. But not in mine, thank you! The meal finished, as is usual, with the rice box. You are supposed to finish up by disposing of three cupfuls. I didn't manage three, but I did learn that rice is not just rice. It is the Honourable Rice. In Japanese you say, "O-gohan," not merely "gohan." Coffee they hadn't apparently heard of, so I drank "sake," a heady drink made from the Honourable Rice.

As the girls retired with the remnants of the meal O Kona San knelt with downcast eyes and said a single word—"Geisha!" Like the bath-boy's suggestion of a bath, it was uttered in such a compelling tone, in such natural assumption that no other course was possible, that I said, "Yes, please, I think I will," before I realized

that my heart was bounding with the excitement of my decision. I knew something, of course, about the famous Geisha of Japan—who doesn't? But face to face it was a different matter. How could I carry off this private entertainment? I was wondering, too, how many you ordered. Was one enough, or did you ask for two or three?

Fortunately I wasn't asked. Miss Kona's eyes were happy and indulgent, and she retired with a smile. I made a pillow of two elbow cushions and stretched out in comfort on two sitting mats. I wanted a good rest before I faced the ordeal of squatting again. The old lady entered with several extra mats. A girl followed with a bottle of "sake" and several spare cups. As the door opened I could hear a voice I recognized as O Kona San's, speaking on the telephone. I lay back again in comfort, but in a very few minutes the 'phone call brought its response. There were breathless cries of pleasure as the rickshaw boys dashed up in style to the gate. Mingled with them was the laughter of the geisha girls.

I was still wondering whether to stand up to receive the visitors when a section of the wall was opened wide. Three girls, in a row, had their heads bowed before me. I hastily wriggled round to a sitting position. To my relief the third girl proved to be the resident interpreter herself, and my difficulties vanished. The Honourable Kona ran forward into the room and sat by my side. With a "shush-shush" of doll-like feet encased in soft booties the geisha girls followed her and were introduced. One was named Pearl something and the other Jewel something. Their Japanese names I cannot hope to remember. They settled beside me with the grace of falling petals, fragrant and soft, too delicate and shy for the coarse traffic with which their kind are sometimes credited.

But they fairly embarrassed me with their demure attentions. Jewel brought the brazier nearer to me and took my hands in hers to show me how to warm them over the smouldering embers. While she arranged

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my cushions to make me utterly comfortable, Jewel brought a cigarette, placed it in my lips and lit it. Together they patted my shoulders to reassure me, and brushed mythical specks from my silken kimono. Before they had been in the room five minutes the male in me was fairly purring.

Yet, at the same time, whenever I caught the eye of one of them she was gazing at me with a disconcerting devotion, an innocent homage hard to describe. It was intensely personal yet virginally impersonal. If I smiled I might have given them both a fortune. Yet if I only smiled at one not the faintest shadow passed over the face of the other. Tiny hands on my knee called my attention to anything which O Kona San's pleased interpretation had missed. Or a little hand in mine said something which words couldn't interpret. Soft laughter and gurgles of sheer delight came from behind hand-painted fans on the slightest provocation. They played their samisen, the loose strings wailing like lost souls. Sometimes one would sing, sometimes both. Then, while O Kona San played her harp, the two would dance, shuffling back after each little performance to see that I was warm and comfortable, and that my cigarette was alight. Their eyes sparkled after the dance, and their faces glowed like rosy Japanese lanterns. Then back they would go, with their sliding feet and their eloquent arms moving in strange fantastic rhythm that had a simple charm of its own. Not once were the feet lifted from the floor. Face to face they turned and swayed, their arms uncovered to the shoulder as their fans waved in the air, their legs bare from the white sock at the ankle to the knees as they turned and twisted.

Fresh hot "sake" was brought in, but a sip was all that the geishas would touch, handing back the cups with their honourable thanks and with innumerable bows across the shining black table.

But it served to prepare me for the finale of this strange

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performance. Thousands of miles from home, in a strange country, and with the male in me now not merely purring but rampant, I found myself back in my childhood days, playing the games of that halcyon period. Musical chairs, blind man's buff, and other childish games we played in their Japanese counterparts, using cushions for chairs and all tumbling in a heap in a mad scramble for the last vacant seat. And before they departed, like children at a party, they showed me their "treasures"—little pieces of cheap jewellery, face-powder, "snappers," and little dainty oddments of boxes, and mirrors and knick-knacks. I admired them all, while they listened to the tick of my watch and marvelled at the antics of my pocket compass.

But all parties come to an end. It was time for these grown-up children to be sent back to bed. The last I saw of them was a pair of shining black heads prostrated towards me in the doorway. The last I heard of their musical voices was their greeting to the rickshaw boys asleep between the shafts of their rickshaws. A scrunch on the gravel. They had gone.

O Kona San had gone downstairs with the geishas. I was left alone with my thoughts. Not for long, however. I had forgotten the passage of time under that strange spell and imagined that bed was the next move. But no. The door opened to reveal a low table with lacquered bowls, carried in by the two maids. Supper. Two cigarettes later the old lady followed the girls in with my bed, soft wadded quilts that were spread in a corner. A soft kimono was laid out on top, then with wishes for a happy dream—at least it sounded like that—the little retinue departed.

I changed my kimono and after one or two attempts achieved a comfortable position in the bed. In a few minutes I might have been asleep, but along the corridor came the softest of footsteps and the screen slid back.

"Mother wishes to know if you are not lonely—in

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this strange room?" It was the voice of the resident interpreter speaking with soft stress. But it was into the eyes of O Kona San that I looked. The lamp in her hand wavered slightly, making it difficult to read those dark eyes.

"It is highly probable," I countered, wishing to be nice.

"Mother wishes me to assure you that it is not necessary to be so," she replied softly.

"And you?" I replied.

"I wish, like your poet, to make assurance doubly sure," she said, placing the lamp on the table and ransacking a cupboard by the door for more quilts.

Then in the darkness I leant over. But it was only to find a pair of lips closed and unresponsive—until I remembered that the Japanese laugh at the European kiss as portrayed on the films. "Not very high class love," they call it. I murmured her name.

"O Kona San."

Her hand gently stroked my cheek. She spoke quietly, conveying her sense that everything was as it should be, that she was peacefully at home lying in this little room beside me. I leant forward again to kiss her cheek, but she moved swiftly back and I kissed the pulsating life of her throat. My hand was on her heart, which was beating fast. With a swift movement she freed her right arm from the sleeve of her kimono. She pushed it beneath me, holding me. Her sash, a narrow one worn only at night, was tied in a bow round her slim waist. With her disengaged hand she was pulling the bow undone . . .

Her voice died away in a murmur.

For me it was the voice of Japan. The voice of the Japan I ran away from the next day, blushing when I reached the searching eye of the Russian captain. Fujiyama faded again into the distance without movement or shadow, secret and still. But Fujiyama and I *both* held secrets this time.

CHAPTER IV

THROUGH THE PRISON GATES

Two men made a wild grab at me. The ticket collector gave a yell and in a moment half the platform was yelling "Oy! Oy!" and words I couldn't understand. The train was moving out. I side-stepped one man, dodged round a porter who had his arms spread wide, and made a dash for the moving train. But the step was high and the door strange. I nearly finished my travels for good beneath the grinding wheels. But I managed to climb in and leaned out of the window with an idiotic grin intended to pacify the station staff. Evidently the Chinese railway-men of the Hsichch-men station didn't take the same calm attitude towards Hari-Kari that the Japanese do. They wanted no suicides on their line.

Dripping with perspiration I sank back on a leather-covered seat under a whirring punkah, and ordered a long drink. I was still a bit shaky. I had spent a trying day in Tientsin getting a Chinese passport and various documents covered with queer Chinese signatures. At the last moment, when I was nearly in despair, I had caught the train to Peking. But something I had eaten or drunk had made me ill. Instead of a day's sight-seeing in Peking I had spent a miserable day in bed. When I returned to consciousness that morning it was to find the room half dark, but the sunbeams pouring in through the cracks in the curtains. Putting my hand out I had found a mosquito net enclosing me like a cage. Then a mysterious white figure had flitted in, but all I could see clearly was a pair

of velvet slippers and part of a pair of oriental leggings where the sunbeams reached the floor. A Chinese boy pulled back the curtains and brought me food on a tray. I had made half a meal when a glance at my watch had brought me to my feet in a rush which had ended in that wild dash up the platform.

I lay back on my seat while the train puffed and groaned its way over the Nankow Pass and through the Great Wall of China. After nine hours' travel I arrived at Kalgan, on the Mongolian frontier, dirty and hot and far from cheerful. The great explorer who was going to achieve a boyhood's ambition by following the great Marco Polo's trail across the Gobi Desert had given way to the schoolboy with a tummy-ache. But I cheered up considerably as I passed through the noisy crowds on the platform and reached the entrance. Outside were the waiting crowds of rickshaw boys. As each one secured a fare there was shrieking and shouting and ringing of bells as they threaded their way slowly through the swarming Chinese streets. There was so much that was new and exciting that I had to keep on twisting my neck and my body so as to miss nothing.

While the military police were examining my passport and papers I stood watching the tall, heavily-laden donkeys patter through the crowd to cries and blows. Then came majestically striding Bactrian camels with the riches of Mongolia loaded on their backs. Silent and imposing, they towered above the shrill multitude. On their backs, gazing unconcernedly round, were grim weather-beaten drivers in robes of glorious colours. The curling smoke of their jade pipes rose above the crowd like incense. They filed along the street without once turning their heads, their calm expression as unfathomable as the camels', as if the wisdom of the world lay behind their slanting eyes. They had come from distant deserts, from the remotest corners of

Tartary, after months of wearisome travel, to the swarming Chinese part of the city of Kalgan to dispose of their merchandise. I gazed fascinated, almost unaware of the growing storm in front of me.

But I was in for a rude awakening. The army of officials examining my papers had grown steadily. At a word from one of them, two soldiers from the station entrance approached and took up positions on each side of me. They grabbed me and demanded my Mongolian visa. Without an interpreter, my alternative, which was a letter of introduction written in English and addressed to the Torofsky Salt and Fur Traders, was about as much use as a cold in the head. We soon arrived at the state I was *beginning to recognize as inevitable* in any language difficulty, the stage when everyone endeavours to make his meaning clearer by shouting louder and louder. The hectic state of affairs caused by increasing Japanese aggression, Russian interference, Mongolian jealousy, and Chinese officiousness caused trouble and inconvenience to the most respectable of travellers with cast-iron documents and obvious duties and destination. A vagabond wanderer like me, with incomplete papers, only a rucksack as baggage and the vaguest of plans was fair game. There was only one answer to all the doubts I presented to their official minds. Prison!

So into the jail I went. The first part of the Russian captain's prophecy came true. We had been talking over a half-hearted game of cards while the old tramp kicked its way across the sweltering heat of the Yellow Sea. The skipper had asked me about my plans. I told him I hadn't any except that I had a letter of introduction to some Fur Traders in Kalgan and that I proposed to use it if at all possible and become a second Marco Polo. I modestly kept my own idea of crossing the Gobi Desert under my hat. He had just grunted and said: "All you'll ever see of Mongolia,

my lad, will be the six by five of a prison cell. And there you'll stay."

"Thanks, skipper," I had replied. "I'll drink a toast to you and your old tub in prison water if your prophecy comes true."

So that night, when my grim-faced Mongolian jailer brought in a hunk of dry bread, a piece of goat's cheese and a jug of water, I solemnly toasted the skipper. I also drank confusion to all Mongolian and Chinese officials, but the doors of my prison did not fly open.

There had been a moment at the station when a volley of abuse and some high-handed action might have got me away from the yelling pack of officials. I had sensed the possibility, but was just too late in applying the remedy. When I tried it eventually, it only made matters worse, so for a time I decided to lie doggo. But it was not easy. I walked backwards and forwards, two steps each way, just like the conventional prisoner of fiction. When I sat down, I could hear the cries and groans of other prisoners. After a time of quietness the rats scuffling somewhere in the dark corners grew bold and came sniffing out to investigate. Fortunately I felt pretty fit again, but sleep was out of the question. At least, that is what I thought until I woke up to find some more food and water by my side. How long I had slept I didn't know, but I did know that it was about time I did something.

When the guard appeared again I told him as firmly, and with as much authority as I could command, that I wanted to see an officer. He naturally didn't understand a word, and didn't change his expression by the flicker of an eyelid. But his superiors must have heard something because, after an hour or two of maddening inactivity, I was taken to another room crowded with four officers and my two guards. By shouting and pantomime I finally succeeded, when I was nearly exhausted, in convincing them that an escort through

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the town would give me a chance to find the people who could establish my identity.

I was placed under the guard of four heavily-armed policemen and handcuffed to two very smelly ones, both barefooted and dirty. I remember being quite flattered by the size of my bodyguard. It was a very different affair for my bodyguard though. They highly resented their job, and they didn't need to speak my language to let me know it, either. The sun was blazing. The road burned my feet and the reflection from it troubled my eyes. I was hurried when I wanted to go slowly, while if I slowed up to watch a passing caravan or to stare hopefully into a crowd for a sight of a friendly face, my ragged companions jerked me on by my handcuffed wrists.

Despite my predicament I was thrilled with the strange sights and sounds of that busy frontier town. But very few people even troubled to glance at my escort or at me, which was most disappointing after I had been blushing at the thought of being towed round a strange city in such company.

The streets in the Chinese quarter were so narrow that we nearly brought the traffic to a standstill as we forced our handcuffed way along. We marched in a cloud of dust from the wagons of a caravan of bullock-carts in front. Very soon my escort and I were indistinguishable for grey dust. The town's naked children and masterless dogs rolled about in the same dust until we were all of the same hue. Only the caravan drivers, with sweat-glistening naked backs as they yelled and whacked, seemed to have any colour left.

It was two o'clock when we started out on our Crook's Tour of Kalgan. It was early evening when we arrived at the walled compound that housed the Torofsky Traders. One of the many guards at the massive iron-studded gate delivered my letter to the

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Traders. Explanations and apologies poured over me in a flood. But I had to walk all the way back to the prison to get my handcuffs undone. I could have ridden back in a cart if I had been prepared to wait, but my smelly escort would have to be accommodated at the same time, so I preferred to walk back. At last, twenty-six hours after my arrival, I was free again. A rickshaw took me back to the great walled compound. The iron-studded door clanged behind me with a thud like the closing of the prison door, but I was in a very different world.

My new French and Russian friends were the only people in the town who spoke English. They operated a salt and fur trading company that had caravans following the old "Marco Polo Trail" backwards and forwards across the Gobi Desert to the Mongolian city of Urga on the Siberian border. I wanted their help, but before I could get in a word about my plans I had to receive their hospitality. A bath was the first necessity, and then a shave. My letter of introduction must have said some nice things about me, because by my appearance I was more like a desperate criminal than anything else. But the bath worked wonders.

It was a Russian bath this time, in a hut across the compound. A furnace about five feet high heated water in a great pan. As the water boiled it was poured into buckets which were taken into the next room. In the furnace itself were great boulders. When these were red-hot they were rolled to the hot room and a bucket of boiling water emptied over them. A gush of hot steam made me gasp for breath and clutch my naked body. I lay on a platform about two feet high while the sweat poured off me, carrying away conclusive proof that I was dirty. I swilled myself down, soaped my hot body, swilled again and sweated profusely for an hour. Clean as a new pin, I was ready for anything.

Over dinner we talked and talked. They ridiculed

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my intention of crossing the Gobi with a guide and one boy. "Too dangerous without an escort of soldiers," said one. "Some of your fellow-prisoners of last night are waiting execution for an attack on an *armed* caravan. Our own camel caravans are escorted by troops armed with machine guns, and machine guns are mounted on the lorries that make the journey. You should—what do you say?—think again young man."

His manner was as precise as his English—I thought again. I heard more stories of the dangerous and well-armed bandits that infested the desert. Of their trick of making wild dashes just out of range, until the ammunition of the merchants and travellers was used up. The heat vibration in that desert made good shooting almost impossible for those not used to its tricks. There was only one thing to do, and I put the idea forward. It would be suicide for a small party to go armed. But three unarmed men, carrying practically nothing of value, might get their supplies stolen but would not be harmed themselves. After all, these brigands wanted money and goods, not just a target.

In any case I was determined to go. Finances made an escort out of the question, and I wanted it to be a vagabond trip, not just marching with an army. What with the desert itself, and the robbers and possible passport difficulties, it presented enough difficulties to make it quite an exciting journey. And I had come a long way just for that particular purpose. I put the suggestion forward with enough enthusiasm to carry the day. I knew that without the help of the gentlemen listening to me I might as well turn back straight away. They listened; they shook their heads over the whole idea; I could see them thinking thoughts about scatterbrained youngsters and ignorance being bliss, and so on; but—they agreed to help me. I went up to my carved wooden bed in peace and dreamt all night.

THROUGH THE PRISON GATES

A distant desert sandstorm veiled the early morning sun and cast an eerie reddish light on the compound as I went across for breakfast. A number of Chinese and Mongolian boys were brought into the compound. Trusting solely to a non-existent, or at least unproved, capacity for judging character from faces, I chose a rather fat Chinese boy named "Wahl," whose cheerful grin and round shaven head took my eye. His clothing was reasonably clean and his English was fairly clear. His willingness augured well for his work as handyman, and someone vouched for his cooking. The guide was already chosen—a Mongolian named "Kazin," who had guided the Swedish explorer, Sven Hedin, on several occasions. He wasn't handsome, but he looked dependable. His loose-fitting clothes of padded wool were dirty, and the wool sticking out of the several holes in his coat, combined with his dark skin and slanting eyes, gave him a slightly sinister look, but his recommendations as a desert guide easily out-weighed that.

Next came the choice of camels. This I unhesitatingly left to Kazin and Monsieur Torofsky. They chose three riding camels and two baggage camels from out of some two hundred in the market place. They were, without exception, ugly and ungainly brutes, with scraggy fur peeling off in handfuls. They were enveloped in an unpleasant odour, too, that I hoped I should get used to. I looked round at those two hundred dirty, slobbering, spitting, ungainly, screaming camels, and thought of all the romance and adventure they typified. "Ships of the Desert" indeed! One of them got up and ran away from its owner as I watched. Its legs flew out in all directions, as though it had no control over them. Majestic as the camel looks when slowly pacing the desert or making a most impressive silhouette against the sunset, he looks utterly ridiculous when running on his long wambling legs and screaming

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like a chicken. Later I learnt to respect the camels' patient endurance and strength and even to like them. But those nasty yellow teeth and snake-like heads, those petulant outbursts of dangerous temper, and the continual slobber were big handicaps.

There were still a few purchases to make, among them a low squat tent made of goat and camel hair dyed a queer purple colour. A low strong tent is necessary to face up to the fierce sandstorms. For the cold nights I was warned to expect, I obtained sheepskin sleeping bags with the warm wool on the inside. One full day completed all arrangements for the journey. Baggage and animals were settled inside the compound for the night ready for an early start. I took a last look round the town before going to bed, and saw the gates of the city closed for the night as a bell tolled. There were caravans in the distance which would camp outside the walls until sunrise.

At dinner that night there were strange faces ; friends of the Torofsky Traders, who had heard of the American boy's trip across the desert. They made quite a farcwell party of it, and were extremely nice to me. If I had drunk half the vodka I refused I should *never* have got away. As it was, with some vodka and cherry brandy, and something I believe was a quince brandy, which I did not refuse, I went to bed singing. And singing is one of those things that I certainly shouldn't do.

CHAPTER V

CAMEL BELLS AND A MONGOLIAN PRINCESS

THERE were crowds at the gate before dawn. The two men who pulled out the great bars of the Taching-Wen (North Gate) and swung back the great doors were nearly swamped between the crowd waiting to go out and the caravans waiting to enter. But only for a moment. Then the people inside stood back in silence.

A bedraggled little procession on tired horses came through the gate, the caravans beyond giving them precedence. Three Mongolians in the centre were supported on their horses by other riders. They were wounded and dead-beat. The little procession was all that remained of a long caravan. Two Russians had been killed and many of the compatriots of the wounded men and their helpers would never see Kalgan again.

Wahl and I pressed closer. Hemmed in by a sea of excitable and frightened Mongolians I began to catch some of the excitement and fear of the unknown perils outside those walls. That wouldn't do, so I pulled Wahl back and went over to Kazin, standing by the waiting camels. With something of the feelings that a crashed pilot might have as he takes off again at the earliest possible moment before his nerve goes, I hurried my little caravan to the Gate and away. I knew, too, that the news of still more robbery and murder might tempt the Torofsky traders to put an embargo on my trip.

Through the dense cloud of dust, raised by the approaching caravans, the newly-risen sun looked like

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a tired sallow reflection of itself, but soon it regained its intimidating strength and we were all, camels and men, conscious of its power. The road led through a dark echoing tunnel. Out in the sunshine again, I looked back. We were in a great open space. Towering above us was the Great Outer Wall of China, through which we had ridden. On the right was a mountain. A wild river gorge followed the line of the Wall until it disappeared behind a watch tower of massive flame-coloured bricks. On the open space before us was spread out a great market place, where for centuries Chinese merchants from the East had met the nomads and traders of the West.

All the necessities and most of the luxuries of life were spread on booths under grey awnings. Tea and tobacco, clothing and guns, sheep-skins and fur coats, boots, bright scarves and wide Mongolian sashes; lengths of red and yellow cloth for the Lamas, and of every other colour except grey or black for the women; scents, hides, wool and leather goods, saddles and bridles, jade and rugs and ornaments of gold and silver—a grand display.

Gaily dressed Mongolian horsemen lovingly fingered their silver and chased knives as they swung in their saddles; dignified Mohammedans sat turbaned and motionless on their mats; high-heeled Kirghiz, in pointed fur caps, pranced past; men of a dozen nationalities and occupations wandered around or tried to sell their goods. I could have lingered for hours.

As we moved up the valley, really a dried-up river bed, the mountains towered up above us. At every corner, erected on apparently unclimbable crests and ridges, red watch towers appeared, mostly in ruins, reminders of the days when the Great Wall held back the menace of the wild Tartars. Down this same road the great nomad chiefs had brought their hardy warriors to conquer some great stretch of Northern China, only

to be absorbed and swallowed up by the uncountable millions of China. The strong Wall and these ruined watch-towers have seen victory and defeat take turn about and be alike forgotten in the long history of that stormy pass. At one point we passed the strange cliff dwellings of some of the Chinese, high above us, looking like swallows' nests. It was heavy climbing, but at last we saw before us the end of the pass. In front was the high plateau of Central Asia. Behind us, the range of the Shasi Mountains, with Kalgan secure behind the Great Wall. Between the two, the valley was ribbed with great ravines, a glorious picture in the afternoon sun.

We hadn't long to look back. The endless steppes of Mongolia, with multitudes of wild flowers and waving grass, were before us, stretching into the distance that gave way finally to desert mirages. Around us were vast forests and snowy mountains, wild rivers and the road to the great unknown. With good camels, lightly loaded, we strode along over the level country at a fine speed. It was on those good days, when my little outfit was striding along happily through the beautiful steppe country, open for miles to the winds and wonderful dry air, that I had sometimes to pinch myself to be sure that I wasn't dreaming it all. Swaying along on a camel, I was lord of all creation and king of all the humans in sight, even though there were only my two boys. I was often afraid that I would wake up in the office in Toronto, or find that I was swaying to and fro in the New York Elevated. But if the burning sun didn't convince me, a slight nausea from the swaying of the camel would prove the reality of my splendid dream.

The first night we had sheltered at the mission town of Hei-Mo-Hou, where the water was good. Kazin had pointed out to me the stone lining of the well. It appeared that the well was dug for the use of some

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trading nomads before the days of Abraham. The second day we passed the Tabul hills, and hurried on to reach the little mud village of Panj-Kian before dark. That village, too, was Chinese, and I wanted very much to see my first real Mongolian village. It was not until the third day of fast travelling that the landscape changed. We left the pleasant grasslands and began to travel over sandy steppe. At intervals there were stretches of moss-like flowers, beautiful in their deep violet colour. That day I saw jackasses and my first herd of antelope. We made camp in the open but near a well. It was the desert at last. Somewhere in the distance were the nomads. Their village might be one day or three days' journey away, as they pack up and move on at any time that pasture and water make a change imperative. It would only be with luck if we came across one at all. So I had to be content with hope.

After supper that night I left the tent and the fire and wandered into the desert. But if I did gaze up into a velvety sky ablaze with stars : if I did fill my lungs with the cool and bracing night air and feel like dancing and shouting in an ecstasy of living, yet I had sense enough to keep carefully within a wide circle round that tent. Far enough away for the boys not to see my out-flung arms and my mad excitement at being in the desert, but not so far that I lost the gleam of the little fire. Then we rolled into our blankets and slept under the clear sky of Asia and a myriad of glittering stars.

With the dawn we were off over the endless undulations of the desert steppes. As far as the eye could see there was nothing but low rolling hills and sand dunes. But we sought in vain for Mongol tents or herds of horses or cattle. It was not until the evening that we spied a Mongolian tending his cattle. From him we learnt of a village, a real nomad's village, fifteen miles away. It was off our course but that did not matter. We camped and waited for the next day.

My introduction, when it came at last, was not altogether a pleasant one. We travelled slowly so that we should not arrive too early in the day. I was very anxious to spend the night in the company of the nomads, and wanted to have a good excuse for staying. My feelings of nausea after days on a camel were lessening each day, but as we were in no hurry I decided to walk a bit as a change from the eternal bowing and swaying. In the distance, herdsmen were standing in their stirrups, while, with robes of purple and yellow flying in the wind, they dashed backwards and forwards rounding up the cattle.

As we drew nearer huge black dogs heralded our approach. I was preparing to remount my camel for a more impressive entry when the advance guard of dogs reached me. I like dogs—in fact, I really love dogs and have no fear of them. But these weren't dogs, they were black wolves. There was no pretence about their spring at me: there was no shamming about the snap of those wild teeth. I was up on that camel again in one wild leap. But as soon as we were in the tent village the dogs remained indifferent: we were accepted, but no more.

The welcome of the villagers was as cordial as the welcome of the dogs was fierce. They were anxious to serve in any way and eagerly assisted in the erection of our tents, and insisted on lending some of their own carpets to make me more comfortable. Their own *yurts*, or tents, were made of a circular framework of peeled willow wands tied together, over which large pieces of felt made of sheep's and goat's wool were stretched. The flooring was a colourful mixture of carpets and rugs, hand-woven on primitive looms.

It was a fascinating place. I wandered from yurt to yurt, accompanied by a number of very curious children to whom I was a continual source of interest and amusement. The wolf-like dogs sniffed superciliously around.

Everywhere were interesting subjects for my sketch book, and my fingers itched for a pencil. I did eventually get out my sketching pad and water colours, but men, women and children all ran at the first sign of their being used as a model. I called Kazin over and made him pose while I made a quick water-colour sketch. They crowded round, exclaiming at every stroke. The paper passed from hand to hand, while I sent Kazin for Wahl and made him pose, too. When they were at last convinced that there was no evil magic about it, I had all the models I wanted.

Strolling round, I saw a young girl busy at her loom, while a young man played a queer stringed instrument. In purple robe, with a magnificent golden sash, he lounged gracefully back on to a richly embroidered saddle. She was rosy-cheeked and very beautiful, with shining black hair parted in the middle and worn straight back. Her colourful dress and baggy boots completed a delightful picture, made all the stranger by the great baggy boots, large enough to carry parcels in. In the winter these boots are stuffed with felt for warmth, but in the summer they flop about empty. The girl must have been young, because the rosy cheeks and beauty of these Mongolian girls seldom last beyond thirty, when the outdoor life and the hot sun leave them as roughened and weatherbeaten as gypsies. They help to tend the flocks: they milk the cattle, weave clothing, cook over dung fires and make endless stretches of felt, as well as bring up large families until all their beauty is dried and shrivelled up. But when they are young they are often marvellously beautiful, with shining teeth and flashing eyes.

Kazin interprets for me. The young couple have not been married very long, and he sings to lighten her household tasks. When my sketch was finished I presented it to them, and have seldom managed to give so much pleasure for such a little effort. They invited me

to dine with them in their yurt. Dinner consisted of yak milk, mutton, rice and cheese, and was a very friendly affair, with pantomime eking out Kazin's interpretations. Sketches of the simplest objects were a source of amazement to them, and they roared with laughter over comic camels with human faces and some other nonsense. Dinner over, my host—his name was Muztagh—knowing that I was camping for the night, invited me to stay with them. I wanted nothing better—a new experience—it sounded good, and I accepted enthusiastically.

"Do you know the custom of these people, master, when one is an honoured guest?" It was Kazin speaking.

"Why, no," I replied. "What is it?"

"In a case like this, where the wife is young and there is no daughter to offer, the guest is expected to sleep with the wife."

"What, with the husband there, too?" I asked incredulously.

"Yes," he replied. "And you can't refuse now. Too great offence—an insult."

As I walked back to my baggage and got one or two things I required, I learnt more about it. What we would call adultery was to these proud nomads only the acceptance of a proffered courtesy—an occasion of mutual delight. Well, when in Rome, etc., is a very fine motto, when Rome has such charming habits.

So, when the desert chill was creeping into the yurt that night, I lay beside my little rosy-cheeked and charming hostess, warm under the felt blankets, while her husband snored happily a few feet away.

I did not run the risk of straining such exquisite courtesy by staying another night, despite Kazin's assurances that it would be taken as a compliment (through the wife, to the discerning husband). Soon after dawn we left, amidst general good wishes punctu-

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ated by the wheezy grumblings of our lazy camels. I often wonder for how long that sketch of mine remained as I saw it last, pinned with a silver brooch to the walls of that romantic yurt.

It wasn't long before we came across evidence of another queer custom of these strange people. We had cut across country away from the caravan route to get back on to our course again, when I noticed a man standing in the centre of a ring of ghoulish vultures and ravens and apparently feeding these hideous birds. He gesticulated and waved us away as I turned my camel in his direction. Kazin urgently entreated me to ride straight on away from the man, and told me the reason as we rode along. What we had seen was the disposal of a corpse by means of the "Mongolian Coffin."

These nomads hate the thought of digging or agricultural work. It is against their superstitious belief to cultivate the soil, and even their bodies must not be buried, or the spirit of the decaying body will return to trouble the relatives. So the corpse is fed to the scavenger birds or animals by a "corpse disposer" appointed for each village. Vultures and ravens are favoured because a body carried up into the air by them attains more quickly and freely to the spirit world. The man we had seen had dragged the body of some member of the village out into the desert before sunrise. He was hacking the body to pieces when we saw him and throwing it piece by piece to the waiting birds.

In a big village where the "corpse disposer" has often to perform his gruesome task, he even makes favourites of some of these hideous birds and calls them by name to receive a tasty morsel. Where death occurs away from a village, a relative places the body on a cart or on a rough litter and drags it at top speed over the roughest and most desolate country available. He is not allowed to look to see if the body has been bumped off, and his superstitious fears keep his eyes rigorously

turned to the front while he drives horse or camel at a furious rate until he feels it is safe to return by a circuitous route to the camp. A pretty gruesome custom, but it is obviously better to be "taken for a ride" and "bumped off" after you are dead, in the Mongolian way, than to make the same journey American fashion.

Leaving the "corpse disposer" alone in his glory, we hurried along back to the trail. By eight o'clock the heat was terrific and the sun seemed to be burning even through my cork helmet. Heat waves were dancing a fantastic bolero on the horizon. I saw my first real mirage—at least, Kazin assured me that it was mirage. I soon believed him because everywhere I looked there were lakes and trees, and even I knew that one small well was the sum total of all the water for miles, and very poor grass was the nearest approach to trees. So we swayed and bobbed along in the heat.

Suddenly Kazin pointed to the horizon where a dark cloud was rolling over the sand-dunes in our direction at express speed.

"Sandstorm!" he yelled.

"What do we do?" I asked.

"Down behind the camels, master. It is only a small storm and will soon blow away."

Down we got. The camels knelt with their backs to the storm without any prompting. We dug out a goat-skin tent, and, kneeling with our faces buried in the camels' long hair, we wrapped the skin round and under us. The camels tucked their noses well under their front legs. We were ready, and just in time. The air shrieked and moaned round us, charged with millions of grains of sand that penetrated all our defences, nearly choking and blinding us. The weird voices of the wind were like ghosts howling in pain, and easily excused the nomads' superstitious belief in evil spirits. It was over almost as soon as it started. With sore eyes we watched it recede into the distance, thankful, as we dug out the

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baggage and ourselves from a pile of sand and collected a few scattered oddments from the surrounding country, that it was such a short one. It might have lasted for days and then it would take real endurance to remain alive at all. Kazin and Wahl grinned their relief.

We decided to celebrate by a rest until the heat had gone down slightly. We lay down, with the hot sand as a pillow, on the side of one of the sand-dunes. I pulled my sun helmet over my face and half-rigged the tent to give some shade. The heat made me drowsy, and I think I must have slept. Kazin and Wahl slept too. We were awakened by a flutter and a rush of air over our heads, and sat up in a hurry with thoughts of robbers and goodness knows what else. It was a great eagle poised above us, with ugly neck stretched down towards our bodies and a wicked gleam in his unwinking eyes. I looked round. There was another eagle perched ten yards away. At Kazin's whispered suggestion we lay down again. Out of the corner of my eye I could see the two birds flap forward a pace or two on ungainly feet. The slightest movement and they hopped back warily and stood patiently watching. I shuddered at the thought of a wounded or dying man lying down as we lay, watching those sharp beaks and wicked eyes drawing nearer and nearer until . . . At the thought I jumped up and set Wahl to preparing a meal before we started off again. The disappointed eagles voiced their surprise and annoyance before sailing swiftly away to more promising prospects for a meal.

On again, we came to a desert stronghold. I hurried forward eagerly. But it was a deserted city. Thousands of pure white cranes had made their homes in the thick mud walls, and a number of jackasses scampered away braying. Within the walls everything lay desolate and abandoned. The marks of machine-gun bullets along the walls and the tattered remnants of Chinese uniforms, red robes and yellow Lama hats, torn and rotting sheep-

skins and felt boots, told the story of Mongolian resistance to the disciplined troops of the Chinese Republic. The modern weapons of the Chinese had caused the desolation around us, and bleached fragments of skeletons were all that remained of victor and vanquished alike. The pure white cranes flew overhead with a rustle of wings. Between the city and the desert the ground was strewn with the cast-off impedimenta of a fleeing army. I thought again of the flapping wings and ungainly hops of the eagles waiting for the last movements of the dying, whose skeletons and grinning skulls lay half-buried in the sand.

Just before sundown we were travelling in the shade of an immense sand-dune, when there came to us the sound of many bells, deep and awe-inspiring in that desolation. The clamour approached and grew louder. A caravan of some two hundred camels, piled high with wool and salt for Chinese Turkestan, appeared along the summit of a long sand ripple. Casting long shadows across the sand slopes, it marched quietly on with a wave from the camel drivers. Hundreds of pictures of camels silhouetted against the sunset had not prepared me for the sheer beauty of the real thing. We watched in thrilled silence. Then Kazin rode off to meet the drivers of the last few camels to get news of the route ahead of us. They reported that a troop of riders had accompanied the caravan for three whole days, riding on a line parallel to the caravan, halting when the caravan stopped and riding on again when the caravan resumed its march, but had apparently lacked the courage to attack. The caravans' armed escort had been on the *qui vive* all that time, but nothing had happened.

The sun set—a glorious burst of gold—the outline of the dunes melted into the luminous twilight, and then swiftly darkness fell. But Wahl had a little fire going, the moon rose on the magic of a desert night, and we were happy again despite the thought of that roving

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band somewhere ahead. We were up again while the desert was still covered by a canopy of stars. The moon had gone, but we groped around by twilight packing up our simple equipment. It is very necessary to get as much of the journey as possible done before the real heat of the day. With hard going we could reach an oasis named Olon-Toroi (Many Poplars), and camp by its cool waters before the setting of another sun. We pitched camp for a midday rest on the side of a vast sand-dune. The camels needed a rest, and their needs had now become our laws. Everything depended on them. Despite the thick pads on their feet, a wild stretch of volcanic gravel on the previous day had cut them a little and they grumbled and complained like spoilt children. Sometimes the noise resembled a human cry, and Kazin told me that they would cry like human beings if their feelings were hurt. I found it difficult to credit them with feelings of any sort, but apparently some of them do develop a real affection for their masters. In any case our lives depended on them now, and it was more for their sakes than our own that we prepared for a long rest during the most uncomfortable part of the day.

Wahl never worried about the sun. While Kazin and I rested in the shade of the tent, smoking happily, he sat out in the burning sunshine and blew till he was red in the face at a smoking heap of camel droppings. We watched him grow redder and redder and shouted good advice to him. His cheerful face grew dirtier and dirtier as he wiped the sweat from his eyes with dung-smeared hands.

Suddenly he looked up, jumped to his feet, and pointed. Seven riders in a cloud of dust were thundering over the desert straight towards us. My heart was pounding with excitement as I stood up and shaded my eyes to watch their approach. Although I had never doubted the real wisdom of travelling without arms, I would have felt much happier with a good rifle in my hands.

However, despite the excitement shown in the beating of my heart, I felt less fear now that the reality was with us than I had felt at the Kalgan Gate. I stared in amazement. At the head of the wild group, whose fiery steeds and barbaric splendour boded ill for my little caravan, was a dark-eyed girl—a Mongolian princess at least. Her wild horse snorted fiercely, rolled a wicked white eye and cocked its ears nervously. But the girl's grip on her mount was firm. Her teeth were pearly white, her clear eyes shone as she gave a disarming smile. She threw down the reins and with a lithe spring was standing beside me.

I have never seen such a beautiful picture of wild, barbaric beauty. Every movement was graceful, a tribute to pride and noble birth. She was dressed in bright-coloured silks—a long robe of pale purple, a green velvet waistcoat laced by gold ribbons, and a long cloak of golden material that met her black velvet boots. From a silver head-dress set with rubies hung ornaments of silver that tinkled as she dismounted, while bracelets and earrings of silver and coral tinkled in unison. The only thing that spoilt the charming picture was the fact that the attendants of the princess were real villains. There were two young Mongols, one in a flashing blue cloak of which he was very proud, while the other sported a Russian uniform tunic which was very certainly not made for its present possessor: it only fitted in places. These two stood with the princess, ill-at-ease and obviously annoyed at her escapade. They looked at me and at my cavalcade in a very haughty manner, and made me rather conscious of defects of apparel and equipment that I hadn't noticed till then. The rest were simple Mongolian soldiers or bandits, dressed in the ragged quilted coats and fur caps that belong to either. But they were heavily armed and their guns were well oiled and held ready for use.

With Kazin as interpreter, I hurriedly invited the

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charming visitor to sit on a sheepskin in the shadiest part of the tent. Wahl hurried back to his fire and the preparation of tea. I found places for the two men also, and in a very short time, as they realized that I was a white man and was prepared to do suitable honour to their princess, they thawed. By the time Wahl had produced a cup of tea we were chatting merrily and the laughter became general. My compass and a clasp knife with all the usual Boy Scout gadgets caused them great entertainment. The boy—he was little more—in the blue cloak produced some jade ornaments for my inspection, and was very pleased when he saw me “feeling” the jade like a connoisseur. I showed them some of the water-colour sketches that I had done in the Mongolian village, and suggested that there was time to paint the princess. It was an unfortunate suggestion. Much as they liked to look at the other sketches, the fear of the evil eye was too strong for the two Mongolians. The princess eyed the sketches a little longingly. She realized what a picture she would have made if I could have only got a fraction of her charm on paper. But the mere suggestion had brought the two men to their feet and the party broke up, to my great sorrow.

The attendants, who had sat in a group in the sunshine, placidly smoking, jumped to their feet. The one who was to bring the princess’s horse to her was a little slow in putting away his pipe and coming forward. I saw the hand of the princess move swiftly to clutch the whip tied to her wrist. As the man noticed the movement he cringed slightly. There were evidently two sides to my charming and romantic princess. However, she made no further sign as she mounted. I took my leave of the lady and her suite. Like a picture from the Arabian nights, they all disappeared among the hills again.

Kazin moved up to my side and said quietly: “It was near here, master, that the Russian caravan we saw at the gates of Kalgan was attacked.”

I exclaimed. "You mean they might have been some of the same bandits?"

"May be so," he replied.

"And the princess?" I asked, still incredulous.

"May be so," he said again.

I had something to think about as we hurried along again, but when we arrived at the oasis of "Olon Toroi" my speculations about the princess and her followers were soon put aside. Another caravan was in possession of the oasis. Men and camels were just coming to life again after a day of dozing in the cool shade. All the native drivers were aroused by our approach; dogs barked and men shouted greeting. To my great surprise and pleasure we were greeted by a German boy, about my own age. He spoke perfect English; in fact, in his shorts and with a dark-tanned face, I thought he was English until he introduced himself as Walter Branchle. We were soon on very friendly terms. He was taking a big caravan through to Chinese Turkestan, where his people were engaged in the import trade.

The two parties were soon intermingled. We were all very pleased to meet new faces. For dinner that night we pooled our resources, which meant that Walter provided the food from his larger stores and I provided Wahl as a very enthusiastic cook. We made a real feast in as romantic a setting as it is possible to conceive. The moonlight filtered through a dome of date palms and poplar trees and made a patchwork pattern on the sand. All around happy groups of natives sat round a dozen separate fires and played and sang. Then to the joy of white companionship of my own age was added the kind of dinner I had nearly forgotten existed. There was lamb, dumplings, green peas, and rice, followed by tea and biscuits and—greatest joy of all—canned peaches. I lit my pipe and sank back on to a heap of cushions and rugs with a sigh of sheer content.

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Until eleven o'clock that night we talked, only pausing to replenish the fire or our pipes. Young as he was, Walter had made the long journey with the caravan a dozen times or more, and had plenty of stories to tell. Stories of long night marches under the desert moon and of the bandits who infest the route. He listened to my description of the beautiful princess with great interest. Without any hesitation he took Kazin's view about the romantic lady.

"There's no doubt in my mind," he said, "that you met some of the band who attacked the Russian caravan. The lady may or may not be involved, but I'll bet anything you like that her father and her brothers and her cousins and her uncles are in it, as you say, up to the neck. If your baggage had looked worth stealing it is doubtful if you'd be here now."

I asked him if I were safer without firearms, and he said that he himself would prefer to go armed, even in a small party. He offered to let me have a Mauser rifle. But he had to agree that it was pretty hopeless for a small caravan to put up an effective resistance against a large body of robbers. He himself had been attacked with a small caravan, and even with three good shots in the party and plenty of ammunition there was a certain amount of luck about his escape. His "number one" boy had been smart enough to beat the attackers at their own game by ambushing them some way from the caravan and killing three of them himself. The method of attack he outlined agreed word for word with the method mentioned by the Kalgan traders. I couldn't see how one gun would help me, and I said, "Thanks very much, Walter, but I'll continue to rely on 'Lady Luck' until I reach Urga. I am returning to Kalgan by motor caravan anyhow . . ."

Walter had already postponed the start of his caravan from sundown to eleven o'clock, and really had to go on. With deep regret I watched them make ready for

CAMEL BELLS AND A MONGOLIAN PRINCESS

the march. More than a hundred camels were piled high with loads. As they filed gracefully and solemnly out from the oasis to the desert, the bells of the camels breaking the silence of the night, I walked beside Walter for a mile or so, leading his camel. Then, after a final good-bye, he mounted. The caravan swung slowly past me, each driver raising his hand in farewell. With a last wave they were lost to view. As I walked slowly back to camp through the magic of the night I wondered if I should ever be able to visit Walter in his home in Turkestan as he suggested. Kazin and Wahl were sound asleep in their sheepskins by the embers of the dying fire. I lay down beside them and slept.

We moved on to Ude and the Russian border. After some misgivings I reported the visit of the Mongolian princess at the spot where the Russian caravan had been attacked to the Russian Border police. Walter had urged me to, and Kazin said that he would if I didn't, so I reported it myself, leaving out the princess.

They didn't seem the least bit concerned about the robbers. A shrug or two was all the attention *they* got. That suited me all right. But it didn't suit me at all to find that they were very interested in me. Russia at that time was using Mongolia as a buffer State. They did not like strangers who crossed their borders on this particular route. I had had quite enough of Russian and Mongolian officials at Kalgan to last me a lifetime, so I quickly produced the letter Mr. Torofsky had given me in anticipation of any such difficulties. To my relief it worked like a charm. They produced a special pass which enabled me to go to Urga but no further. Mr. Torofsky, in the letter, guaranteed that I would then be joining one of his caravans, and made himself responsible for my return. And to think that I had nearly lost that letter in a mishap to one of the boxes! My blood ran cold at the thought.

Ude itself was a miserable hole. Just a few mud

DISTANT HORIZONS

houses in the centre occupied by the police officials and a Russian telegraphist. Some Customs officials lived in large tents, and a large garrison of Mongolian soldiers lived in a collection of "yurts" behind the houses. I couldn't even buy tobacco, and had to put myself on rations. We did get some eggs, but not much else. The soldiers apparently had nothing to do except to try and frighten the life out of poor old Wahl, who was nearly in tears when I returned. We soon cleared out and camped in the desert, although I had intended to spend at least a day in Ude. Another day's march, and we had left the great Gobi desert behind. In front were blue hills.

CHAPTER VI

LAMAS AND LOVERS

WAHL was enjoying himself. I believe that he had made flapjacks for that particular meal just to show off. As he tossed each pancake in the air a gasp went up from a thousand throats just as children gasp when rockets go flying up.

After a hundred lonely meals, we had an audience. We had arrived at Turin late the previous night and had settled into camp after dark. In front of us, what had appeared in the fading light to be a huge ruined fortress, turned out to be the lonely desert stronghold of three thousand lamas. The four monasteries nestled high up in the cliffs where the eagles soar. Around the base were pill-box huts. We had camped in a very desirable spot in the shadow of the overhanging cliffs, but if we wanted privacy we had chosen the wrong place.

Before we had rubbed the sleep from our eyes a thousand lamas had gathered round our little camp. Curiosity swelled the numbers every minute. Wahl showed a new side to his character. He was a perfect showman. Like a conjuror or a cooking expert giving a demonstration to a huge audience in a great Exhibition Hall, he pulled back his sleeves to show that there was absolutely no deception; showed his audience every pot and pan, and even held up the fork for their inspection; then broke each egg as if he were performing a sacred ceremony, held up the bowl for all to see, and beat the mixture of flour and eggs and milk until his arms must have ached. The curiosity of the lamas grew even greater after this performance. I had quite

a job to keep them on the right side of a rope I had been forced to stretch across in front of the tent so that we could eat in comfort. Our toilet was equally an occasion of interest, although neither Kazin nor I could equal Wahl's sublimely unself-conscious performance. In fact, Kazin even became a little rattled by the crowd, while brigands and travel emergencies alike had always found him cool and collected.

The red and yellow robes of our huge audience would have made a wonderful splash of colour against the rocks. Unfortunately the majority of the lamas were such symphonies of dirt and grime that very little of the flashing colours remained. In order to relieve the pressure on the camp I decided to return the compliment and to pay the lamas a visit. A few of them led the way when they learnt of my intention, while about a thousand of the more smelly ones decided to follow me.

Up we went—and what a climb it was! Through dark tunnels, up innumerable ladders and precipitous steps, through a mystifying maze of corridors cut from the solid rock we scrambled, the whole place echoing with our noise. We emerged on to a great ledge that supported one of the monasteries. I looked down on to the tent far below. With my huge bodyguard around me I ventured into the open doors. The enormous hall was wrapped in a mysterious twilight, thick with incense, illuminated only by the flickering uncertain light from lotus-shaped candelabra at the back. From the walls and ceiling hung multitudes of painted banners and embroidered draperies. Far off I could see the shape of a gigantic gilded image of Buddha and images of lamaistic saints. Chanting lamas sat cross-legged on yellow cushions. Drums and cymbals sounded from hidden corners . . .

The murmur of voices hushed behind as I entered each chamber in a fantastic tour of inspection. I was shown walls decorated with paintings symbolizing all

the saints and spirits revered by the Mongols. There was one at which I paused for a long time. From a tall tree hung bunches of the most delicious fruits and at the foot of the tree stood a huge elephant. On his back a monkey stood on tiptoe reaching his hands up as high as possible to support a hare. On the head of the hare stood a bird plucking the fruits, some of which had dropped into a heap by the feet of the elephant. By mutual aid the four creatures had reached up to fruit beyond the reach of any one alone. Or at least that is what I presumed it meant.

So long did I stay before I returned to the tent below and the wondering "boys," that I found it difficult to decide whether my curiosity about their lives had exceeded their interest in mine or not. It was a fascinating glimpse of another world for me anyhow. It is an amazing life the Lamas lead, and eighty per cent. of the eligible young men and boys are selected for the work. In these great monasteries dwell the only civil and spiritual authorities that the Mongols recognize. Lamaism came to Mongolia from Tibet in 1295, and is a branch of the Buddhist faith. Each village contributes its quota both of men and money. When the Head Lama thinks a village is not meeting its obligations speedily enough or fully enough, two Lamas are sent out with a wooden box fastened to a pole. The pole is set up in the village, and the villagers believe that the dagger-shaped knives in the box will be let loose in the village if they do not pay. Horrible stories are current as to the fate of the disobedient, and the pole and its box rarely fail to bring forth the required contribution.

My destination, Urga, is the pilgrim resort of the faithful, the seat of Government and the spiritual centre of Lamaism. Only a hundred easy miles away, and the Gobi desert already conquered. We soon packed up and left the lamas behind.

DISTANT HORIZONS

That night we arrived early at a well and found several hundred carts drawn up beside it in orderly rows. It was one of the great oxen-drawn caravans that travel from Urga to Kalgan at certain times of the year. Travelling slowly by long tedious night marches, they take six or seven months to cross. We camped near them to see them start off on their night journey. An hour before sundown the oxen are well watered, as it may be two days before they reach water again. As dusk fell they moved off. The caravan was seen winding like a snake across the steppe and the clank of its many bells rang out monotonously. Always the same notes, always the same melody in the darkness. It would be maddening for a white man, but the drivers and the armed guards all seemed happy enough. Kazin and I rode back along the trail a short distance to see them pass. Soon it came crawling along, a succession of queer silhouettes. The horns of the oxen moving along, the lances decorated with yak-tails at the head of each section, the bowed figures of the drivers, and the glow of amber pipes or of cigarettes shining through the darkness. Above all the creak of waggon wheels and the monotony of the clappers on which the drivers hung strips of red paper painted with Mongolian prayers. Mounted men kept station along the sides of the great caravan. Whistling through their teeth, they kept in constant touch with each other and with the carts. We were back in camp and asleep before the last sound had died away.

The following afternoon we forded the Tola river, and had our first view of the Bogdo-Ola mountain range that towers many thousands of feet above Urga. The clouds were breaking over the mountains, a joyful sight after the interminable plains. Then we saw the great temple on the mountain side as its golden roof caught the sun and reflected it back. A beacon for thousands of devout pilgrims who came from the farthest corners to the Mecca of Asia.

We bathed and washed ourselves thoroughly after we had reforded the Tola River bordering Urga. One last climb, and the city lay at our feet. The rays of the sun I had been cursing for weeks now threw an enchanting light on to the autumn foliage of thousands of birches and larches. The goal of my journey lay before me.

On to the dusty market-place we rode. A caravan of camels passed us in the narrow winding lanes with hardly an inch between us: lamas in coral red and yellow, decked with wreaths of roses, ran almost under the feet of our camels: dogs prowled everywhere, and mounted nomads rode along with flying cloaks. Women with great head-dresses shaped like cows' horns walked past pig-tailed Chinamen and booted, bearded Russians. I left the camels with a friend of Kazin's in the market-place, and with a cheerful Wahl carrying some of the baggage proceeded to find a Russian hotel recommended by Kazin as being primitive but comfortable.

Urga was amazing. My eyes found colour, the colour of romance and excitement for which I had craved all my life, in every direction. Conservative East and modern West existed side by side in a motley combination. Several times a grinning Wahl poked a package in my back as I turned or halted abruptly at some new sight or strange mixture of East and West. But even Wahl looked up and stared when a positively voluptuous Eurasian girl came along. She was dressed in a yellow silk robe that fell slightly to one side and partly revealed a full round breast. Her finely modelled features, slightly olive complexion, and beautiful eyes would have demanded a second glance even in Hollywood's No. 1 restaurant.

I was gazing up at the shop signs, looking for the hotel, when I saw her out of the corner of my eye. A dozen hopeless schemes for attracting her attention and getting to know her flashed through my brain, to be rejected as impossible. At the same moment she smiled and said:

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"Hallo? Can I help you, Americano?"

"Corn in Egypt!" I exclaimed, my wits quite scattered for a moment. "Heaven's helping me!"

"I beg your pardon?" she said.

"The desert has blossomed," I replied, slowly and carefully. "I was only looking for a hotel, which I see is staring me in the face." I had, in fact, seen the name on the door that second. "But that is nothing to the assistance I want now. Could you possibly help me in a private matter?"

She looked very interested, so I proceeded. "I wish to be introduced to the most beautiful girl I have ever seen, but I do not know her name."

"How very unfortunate," she answered, with a smile, and even with a faint blush.

"Perhaps you will have tea with me, and I will explain how you can help me—if you will?" said I.

Before she had time to say no, I had pushed Wahl into the hotel with instructions to book me a room—any room—and was walking through the streets of Urga by the side of its most romantic citizen.

CHAPTER VII

URGA THE GOLDEN

I FOLLOWED my guide through twisting narrow streets. The jostling crowds, the crowding bullock-carts and loaded camels, the noise and excitement all round, made conversation impossible. But in a few minutes we were seated in a little Chinese restaurant, facing each other, with the steam of two glasses of Russian tea rising between us like incense. The inevitable, rather trite, introductory questions followed.

"Have you really come all the way from America?"

"Why, yes," I replied. "But do tell me how you learned to speak English so fluently?"

"Seven years in a Russian Mission School."

"And what do they call you in this man's town?"

"Olga—and you?"

"I'm Carl Shreve—horizon-chaser, artist, seeker after the unusual."

In the romantic setting of that little Chinese shop, as we sat and talked, Olga looked more beautiful than ever. When we came out at last it was hand-in-hand. We had joined forces to explore the town. We went first to the Russian section. Among the trim white buildings inside the wooden stockades Olga pointed out her own home. Then we explored the Chinese Settlement, as crowded and noisy as are the Chinese corners of cities everywhere. The open-front shops had long blue counters piled with silks and delicate jewellery wrought by the craftsmen of the most industrious people in the world. The tortuous lanes were crowded with Lamas, robed in red and yellow, Mongolians in padded coats

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and baggy boots, traders from Siberia and Chinese Turkestan, pigtailed Chinese, and great striding Russians. Weird chants, strange gongs and drums sounded from side alleys and dark corners. The streets were a blaze of riotous colour.

The evening was well advanced as we came to the oldest part of the town. By a temple door I paused.

"What are those odd looking brass cylinders, Olga?"

"Oh, those? Those are prayer-wheels. If there is any blessing you wish, in this world or the next, you just write it on a slip of paper, place it in one of those cylinders—thus. Now give it a spin, and your message will be sent forth to the Buddhist heaven where the Mongolian spirits will grant your wish."

"If that applies to material things," I said, looking into her lovely eyes, "lend me a pencil, Olga."

With all the vivaciousness of her glorious youth, Olga guided me round the ancient Empire of the Khans. As the sun set we walked hand in hand along the star-lit pathway by the side of the Tola River. Peals of laughter echoed across the valley as we strolled back again to the quiet town. It was an evening of enchantment. Saying a last good night on the steps of Olga's home, I obtained a promise for the next day. Olga would show me the great temple on the mountain-side. Together we would swim in the cool waters of the Tola River.

* * * * *

The early morning sun was breaking over the mountain ranges. I whistled softly. Olga came tripping down the steps of her house and greeted me with a beaming smile. How charming she looked in her Russian tunic and bright red boots! . . . Oh, romantic nineteen, who can live without sleep! Tightly I held her hand as we climbed joyously up the path leading to the golden-roofed temple. . . . And what a temple it was. The great golden temple of Ganden and the palace of the "Living Buddha."

We stepped from the morning sunshine into an enormous chamber dimly lit with candles and heavy with the incense of centuries. Behind the altar shrine, as our eyes became accustomed to the dim light, loomed an eighty-five foot bronze Buddha seated on a golden lotus flower. Softly Olga took my arm and pointed to the sacred symbols of Buddhism on the altar—the Horn of Plenty, the Wheel of Life, the Endless Knot—eight of them altogether. A mysterious chant rose from a group of yellow-robed acolytes. We moved closer. But very soon the priests made it plain by their suspicious glances that we were not welcome in their temple. Their penetrating, unfriendly scrutiny drove us out to the sunshine again. We fled upwards to the great tower which houses a huge gong. There was a heavy wooden log poised ready to sound the gong—a deep boom that could be heard twenty miles away.

We walked round it in admiration for a few moments. From that high tower at that time in the morning we seemed to have the world to ourselves.

“You know, Olga, I’d like to sound that gong.”

“No, no, Carl! Don’t do that.”

The warning came too late. I had already released the heavy log. It swung with a great crash into the centre of the gong. The clamour of its voice rang again and again as the vibration swept round us like thunder. It was immense. It was wonderful.

But “Run!” shouted Olga. And run we did. Down the winding steps three at a time. Past the temple doors we fled before a single yellow robe could appear. Then down again, never stopping until we were clear of the temple grounds. All the time the great gong still rang in my ears.

“Whatever made you do such a thing, Carl?” panted Olga. “Those Lamas will be furious—although it was well worth it!”

“I really don’t know, Olga, but I never wanted

to do anything more than I wanted to release that log."

We walked further along the mountain-side until Olga said, "This will do; they will not catch us now. Let's sit on the rocks and enjoy the sunshine."

So we sat down on the rocks, with our feet dangling over a precipice. Several thousand feet down was spread the lovely Tola Valley, with the river and Urga seemingly just below us. I tossed some pebbles down as though I could reach the valley from where we sat. All that happened was that a hawk flew out from a nest below us and floated out over the valley on a level with our eyes, until we too seemed to be floating in space on silent wings. Behind us towered the great Bogdo-Ol mountains, above us the rocks sloped outwards, making us feel rather like flies on a ceiling.

"Doesn't that water look cool and inviting? What about a swim, my little partner in crime?"

But Olga wasn't quite ready. First she wanted to ask me some more questions.

"Why are you so keen to travel, Carl?"

"I don't quite know," I replied; "maybe I've got gipsy blood in my veins, but the real reason, or excuse, if you prefer it, is that I have to travel to gather material for my work."

"What work?"

"Oh, I paint . . . an artist. Sometimes I write. . . . All this," and I pointed to the wonderful valley below, at the same time including her in the picture, "all this helps, and supplies my material."

"Wonderful! Will you make a sketch of me?"

"Sure! To-morrow I'll do several. Now let's have a swim, and then visit the prison."

So we climbed down the rocks. The sun was getting hotter and every bit of the climb down made the cool river seem more attractive. Soon we were splashing merrily in the clear water. I wore my shorts, and Olga

. . . Well, rather less. Then we sat laughing and talking in the sunshine until Olga's hair was dry. By that time we were both famished.

After a real Russian lunch in a primitive café we set out for the famous prison. Olga preferred to wait for me, knowing only too well what those grim walls contained. Around the prison was a stockade of peeled logs. The building inside the stockade looked more like a harmless warehouse, standing soaked in sunshine. Yet it is probably—in fact, I hope it is—the most cruel prison in the world. It is not of Mongolian origin but was built by the Manchus.

The interior, at first impression, enhanced the warehouse effect of the outside walls. Numbers of heavy wooden boxes, rather like coffins, were piled on each other. Each one was about five feet long. But no merchandise, not of any kind or of any country, could have smelt like those boxes. My first feeling of nausea returned with overpowering force as I moved closer to examine one of the boxes. I peeped through a six-inch hole. With a feeling of utter horror I saw within the dark interior a prisoner. His hands were manacled. He could neither sit up nor lie down comfortably in his coffin. All his food and air came through that one small hole. In the coldest weather each prisoner only received one small sheepskin for warmth. In the hot weather his discomfort was even greater with flies, heat and smells.

The wood was nearly five inches thick—the lid fastened with heavy iron brackets. Escape was impossible. Men might be sentenced for a few days, or for life, to that living death. Needless to say, a life sentence was seldom a long one. The prisoners must stay in all their filth until they are released, or until they are taken out dead to be fed to the scavenger dogs. And a life sentence may be earned for horse-stealing or for damaging Government property.

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Almost overpowered, I left that barbaric monument of man's incredible inhumanity and joined Olga in the clean air outside. We walked away. Olga preserved a sympathetic silence. She was also very understanding when, a few moments later, I had to retire to the edge of the roadway to express my complete disapproval of the foulness of that horrible building. She had seen it—once.

The next morning we found an enticing and lonely spot along the river where Olga could sit peacefully while I got busy with water-colours and crayons. We picnicked happily for a whole peaceful and lovely day. I succeeded in completing two water-colours and one crayon portrait. Luck favoured me with some quite good sketches, but I wished and wished that I had had time to do an oil portrait of Olga. In fact, I could willingly have spent a year in Urga. There would still have been queer corners and interesting characters left to paint. Unfortunately, my permit expired with the first motor caravan back to Kalgan.

The day arrived when the eleven trucks of the Torofsky Traders were lined up in the compound ready to receive their valuable cargo. The next dawn was zero hour. That afternoon my camels and my duffle were auctioned. I said good-bye to Wahl and Kazin and thanked them for their faithful service. The little procession of camels and men, marched out of the compound—my first command, now someone else's. Kazin marched out stolidly but the irrepressible Wahl gave me a parting wave and a cheerful grin from the back of one of the faithful slobbering animals I had learned to respect if not to love.

A September moon was flooding the valley with soft light—the surface of the water like a sheet of silver—as Olga and I took a last walk along the banks of the lovely Tola River. From the eddies came the splash and gurgle of water. All around were the musical notes of a frog symphony. We watched the moon float



My First Command

upward to commune in secret with the majestic mountain peaks. From the darkness of a tree came the soft hoot of the sentinel owl. The valley was touched with a magic wand. A wisp of Olga's hair brushed across my cheek.

Moonlight faded to starlight as we sat and held each other close. Across the valley a caravan of camels crept quietly in from the desert, stealing a march on the early dawn. It grew chilly. For a little while longer we clung together. Then, as the sky showed the first streak of amber, we parted—Olga to her little home behind the white stockade, I to the bustle of the compound. Farewell, my Oriental princess, till our trails meet again.

The engines of the trucks were already warming up. The escort of soldiers took their seats. Bristling with machine-guns the modern "ships of the desert" swept out of the compound and into the dawn.

For three days and two nights we ploughed along steadily, only stopping to change drivers and for water. All meals and such sleep as was possible were taken as we went along. The traders do not believe in exposing their valuable cargoes to the risk of bandits for any longer than absolutely necessary, despite the armed escort and the machine-guns. I ate and slept on the canvas-covered boxes piled in the truck beside one of the machine-guns which has been placed in my charge. But we rumbled through the gate of the great outer wall of Kalgan without any adventures. We had taken less than sixty hours to cross the Gobi Desert. It had taken me an exciting month to cover almost the same ground on the outward trail. Regretfully I fastened the canvas cover over the gun and climbed stiffly down. My face, hands and clothes were grey and grimy with dust from the desert.

Mr. Torofsky himself greeted me and whisked me away to a welcome bath.

"Why not be my guest for a few days before you seek

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further adventures?" he asked. "You could do with some home-cooked food and a real bed, I'm sure. Besides, Mrs. Torofsky is expecting you."

"Boy, Oh Boy, would I say No?"

In a few days I revelled in comfort, turned sketches into paintings and mailed pictures and a few thousand words back to the distant editor I had nearly forgotten.

Then came an exciting interlude. Thirteen bandits, some of those who had been my fellow-prisoners before the traders had rescued me, were to be executed. In Kalgan such occasions are a form of public entertainment. I was promised a front line view by Mr. Torofsky, an offer which, despite some inward qualms, I accepted. A great crowd gathered at the prison gates. The police and soldiers had difficulty in clearing a way for the thirteen unfortunate prisoners. They were chained together and marched out to the execution field. While the trumpeters still heralded their arrival, soldiers fastened each man to a pair of stakes, their shoulders to one and their knees to another. They were fastened down in a kneeling position, with about six feet between each man—a whole line of them. The ropes were drawn tight until any body movement was impossible.

The executioner was decidedly the villain of the piece and looked the part. Clad only in a pair of old and very dirty military trousers he waited patiently, testing the blade of his huge two-edged sword with his thumb. When all was ready he stepped forward. The crowd pressed on to the ropes. He waved them back but they didn't move and I was pressed forward with them. Then, as nonchalantly as a golf pro. steps up to the tee and swings at the ball, the executioner approached "victim number one." He swung his great sword high. Swish—crunch . . . with a dull thud the head bounced from the man's knees and came to rest at his feet. The blood spurted out like a fountain. It splashed the front

line of us. Only then did the pressure on the rope ease as we all moved back quickly.

Still mumbling with folded hands their last prayers, the rest of the thirteen waited their turn. Yet even as the horrible swish—crunch, drew nearer to them they gave no outward sign of fear. They were apparently as ready to die as they were ready to kill. Sometimes the next victim turned his head to watch the man before him, die. The executioner saw the thirteenth man turn his head to watch. For the first time even he showed some fraction of emotion. But it was an unfortunate movement on the part of number thirteen. Whether because he was flustered or just tired, I could not be sure, but the executioner missed his first blow. The muscles on his torso glistened as he raised his sword again. But he had to strike twice more before the last head lay on the ground.

Then a nauseated feeling of horror swept over me. Up to that point there had seemed some trickery about it. It couldn't be real—those bouncing heads. But it was! I had a gruesome photograph to prove it. I might have had more, but a soldier intervened and I didn't want to go back to the Kalgan prison again.

CHAPTER VIII

ON A NIGHT OF BLUE VELVET

THE primitive train, with its motley human cargo, squeaked to a stop at the inner Great Wall. Normally this was a tourists' Mecca, worn threadbare by the feet of countless travellers. The tension between China and Japan had reduced the number considerably. There were, however, enough there to provide a note of comedy. Bulging women, mounted on placid little donkeys one-third of their size, rode up the mountain-side exclaiming: "Isn't it just too adorable? I don't see how they *ever* built it." One of them waved her camera in the air and addressed the world in general:

"Would you take a snap of me on this donkey, with the Wall for a background? Oh, thank you so much!"

"That's all right, lady. I hope the folks back home like it," I replied cheerfully, when the honour had been bestowed on me.

The Wall was big enough and grand enough to cover a multitude of sins. Big enough to dwarf a thousand tourists. It came down from the top of peaks that looked almost unscaleable and stretched away in the distance to conquer other peaks as huge. It was amazing to realize that the whip-like line in the distance was yet as enormous and as overpowering as the great tower on which I had climbed. The top of the Wall below me was wide enough for two large trucks to pass each other at any point on the thousand-mile trail. The amazingly good state of preservation of this colossal monument was an additional tribute to the wonderful men who built it.

The train rolled on to the business-like station of Peking. The miserable day I had spent in this city on the way out to Kalgan and Mongolia was a distant memory. I had been incapable of seeing its beauty then, much less of appreciating it. But now, above the heads of the thronging people of a busy town, their yellow and green tiles glistening in the autumn sun, a beckoning beauty of serenity, rose the roofs of the Forbidden City.

Over the courtyards and palaces on that lovely afternoon wheeled clouds of pigeons. The Chinese adore these birds. They place light bamboo whistles under the wings of the pigeons. Each whistle has a different note. As the different flocks circled above the beautifully-moulded Peking porcelain lions and dogs a strain of low music swept along with them. It was enchanting.

The drawbridge lay open to all. The rickshaw boys trotted gaily in where the richest and most powerful in the land once feared to enter. In the huge courtyards, over the Devil Bridges and along the wide steps played little children. The carved panels looked down on happy scenes of play. The fabulous pomp and splendour had gone. So had the grim old occupant of the Dragon Throne, the fierce Dowager whose frown was a death-sentence, whose favour was a dearly-won danger.

As the Dowager Empress is reported to have maintained to the very end the beauty that gained her the throne, so Peking has retained a beauty that has survived a thousand dangers and alarms. The wide roads have run with blood of martyrs and assassins alike, yet still are peacefully gracious. The Imperial Gateway towers up on lovely arches, impregnable to the assaults of time and invasion. On that afternoon of sunshine I found the charm of walls within walls. In the centre was the Forbidden City. Around it lay the Imperial City.

Then came the Tartar City, and the Walls of the Chinese Section.

Threading the Chinese City were charming streets, where for hundreds of years the heads of clever artisans have been bent over the beautiful work for which each street is named: Gold Street, Jade Street, Lantern Street, Embroidery Street, and a dozen others, lined with ancient shops. The work that comes from these shops has the same abiding beauty as the ancient city itself. Exquisite enamel ware, delicate porcelain, filigree work of silver and gold as fine as any in the world; ivory figures; fans, chopsticks, lanterns, carved candles for natives and visitors alike; with jade and gems to tempt the opulent.

In my few days' stay I was fortunate enough to be boarded in a Chinese bungalow outside the Walls. The quaint and unusual house in its unusual setting provided me with delightful lodgings and an unhopd-for opportunity of seeing Chinese family life. The name of my hostess, strangely enough, was Mrs. Chin.

Before I was properly settled the *Peking Chronicle* sent out a reporter. He was a young Chinese, in his twenties as near as I could judge, and had been educated at Harvard. We got on famously. When he had photographed me, complete with knapsack and baggage, and had got his story of my Gobi desert crossing to his satisfaction, Mr. Wong invited me to see the city under his guidance.

Needless to say I accepted with pleasure. Together we visited that wonderland of palaces and temples, gardens and parks, that lies outside the Forbidden City. Leaving exquisite Ming gateways in their perfectly proportioned splendour, we went straight to the Central Museum, a modern building on traditional lines, to find a link between the past and the present. In the Central Park schoolgirls in modern European gym. dresses, and students in straw hats and long white robes, mingled

with Chinese women in lovely silks and embroidered brocades carrying silk sunshades as delicate and as gay as painted butterflies. We saw, close to the Tartar Wall, the ancient markets to which the camel-caravans had made their stately way through the centuries. We went to queer shops where the many friends of Mr. Wong made me welcome, even though I had to harden my heart to keep my low funds from fading away in one burst of spending.

We were on our way to the Winter Palace when I saw a Chinaman lying by the roadside as though he had been hit by a car. Instinctively I called to the driver to stop. Mr. Wong stared at me in astonishment. Then I saw that the man had been dead for several days—the flies had been busy on him. My nose provided additional evidence.

“Why is he left there like that, Wong?” I asked.

Wong explained that ancient Chinese law, which made the first man to touch a corpse responsible for its burial.

“Beggars, like that old fellow there, are sometimes left for days before the police manage to arrange for their burial.”

“But the smell,” I exclaimed.

“Oh,” he said, “they are used to smells here.”

I found that easy enough to believe after I had toured some of the poorer native quarters on my own, and had seen and smelt some of the loathsome foodstuffs of the native markets. Sharks’ entrails, bloody fish, dead rats, cats and dogs; pickled eggs of all shades from purple to black; jelly that looked like black axle-grease; and other things not recognizable, swimming in coloured liquids. Apparently no animal that dies in China fails to find a home in someone’s larder. And the smells just beggared description. In a country where the usual greeting amongst the poorer people means “Have you eaten rice to-day?” very little goes to waste. The

Chinese coolie has learnt to thrive on food that would kill most human beings.

Wong told me other things about his people. He spoke with the slightly pedantic and completely detached air proper to a Chinese Harvard graduate.

"We Chinese," he said, "are most kind and generous to members of our immediate family. And any relative bearing our name is not allowed to want. But most Chinese are almost hostile to any others in need. Beggars are frequently refused even a cup of water."

Certainly I had noticed that very little attention was paid to the comfort or convenience of others. Sweepers send the dust flying in clouds with no regard to passers-by. A merchant watering the pathway in front of his shop would send a bucket of water scattering over the pavement with no slightest thought for the legs of those who might be walking on it. Even the boys playing in the streets knocked into anyone near enough and kicked each other in wild lunges at the ball without any care and without thought of apology. Yet no one seemed to bother. Everything was taken in that calm, even-tempered way so peculiar to the Chinese.

When we reached the Winter Palace there was the colour and grace and dignity of old China—that resigned, slightly pathetic beauty that is the charm of Peking. Of all the lovely things we saw on that afternoon, the yellow porcelain screen of the nine dragons will remain longest in my memory. Against a background of trees it made a lovely picture, the winged dragons almost alive in their action and intensity. After a long and delightful afternoon amidst lotus lakes and wonderful dragons and slender pagodas, with their rows of lovely Buddhas, we just had time to visit a small temple by the side of a lake. Although the walls were cracking and the roof leaked, the long sloping angles of green and yellow tiles, ornamented with Peking dogs and lions in porcelain, retained a beauty

only emphasized by decay—a beauty reflected in the calm waters of the lake. But the memory of the fly-covered face of the dead coolie in the gutter still haunted me. I was relieved to find when we returned that the body had been removed. It was dusk when we arrived at Mrs. Chin's villa. Wong stayed to supper.

Marriages and funerals are still the most important occasions, especially in Peking, where old traditions still retain their hold on all except a few of the "intelligentsia." Funerals wait for a favourable day. The consequence is that when the soothsayers declare the conditions and omens to be satisfactory a number of funerals are held at the same time. One of the "favourable" days occurred while I was in Peking, so I had ample opportunity to see a dozen such processions. But I was extremely fortunate to be present at a native wedding ceremony. Mrs. Chin was kind enough to introduce me into a Chinese family circle, one of her best friends, on the occasion of the wedding of the son.

The wedding feast was held in a Chinese restaurant. I followed two small boys, who carried immense lanterns on long poles. As we drew near to the restaurant in a narrow street the excitement everywhere was obvious. Children swarmed round the doorway and all the neighbours were out in the street. The musicians arrived in a flutter of noise and happy laughter and began to tune up their instruments. Or perhaps I was wrong, and they were playing. I waited rather shyly until they were settled. At last I nervously entered the reception room. It was crowded with women guests, some in white jackets and black trousers, some in exquisite brocades, all beautifully groomed with shining, sleek black hair and most of them wearing beautiful jewellery. Mrs. Chin came forward and introduced me to the bridegroom's mother. That charming old lady smiled a welcome and made a sign to her son. The

bridegroom took me across the courtyard to a room full of men. I exchanged bows and smiles. We listened for a while to the music, while some of the ladies came across and served tea and fruit and cakes. The men strolled across occasionally to the ladies and exchanged bows and words of greeting. It was a happy scene. Even the tiniest of the children present was dressed in its best and all were perfectly mannered.

Then the musicians left. Two of the groom's friends, resplendent in white robes and huge red buttonholes, accompanied them to provide an escort for the bridal carriage. We all crowded to the doors to watch for their return. First came the two escorts. Then the musicians in a colourful group, playing for all they were worth. The noise was terrific. At last came a sedan-chair, covered closely with wonderful embroidery, allowing not a glimpse of the figure inside. The chair was carefully lifted over the threshold by the sixteen bearers until they reached the door of a little room off the courtyard. The bride was immediately surrounded by all the female relatives of the bridegroom until, still unseen, she was safely in the room.

Mrs. Chin explained the rest to me. How the bride must take nothing from the old life to the new. The women of the groom's house take off every stitch of the bride's own clothing and, after a ceremonial washing, array her in the bridal clothes with a red wedding dress over all.

Then the groom was fetched. A moment's hesitation and the curtains were drawn back. For the first time the two were alone together. Meanwhile the altar was prepared. Incense was burned. The ancestral tablets were ceremoniously placed on the altar. Flowers and candles were added, and the marriage was celebrated.

I left the young couple surrounded by their friends. The festivities would go on all night. They would probably last for several days. I went out into a night

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of blue velvet, into a Chinese city ablaze with banners of red and gold and alive with a multitude of people. Rickshaw boys rushed past with a shout of "Hi! Hi! Hi!" Water-carriers, fruit-sellers, children, parcel-laden coolies, stately old men with folded arms; all the teeming life of a crowded city went by. And I felt lonely. It may have been the beauty of the night: the thought of the bridegroom surrounded by friends crowding in with gifts of flowers and food; it may have been the crowded streets of strangers speaking an alien tongue; it may have been a memory of the lovely Tola valley and Olga in a Russian tunic and red leather boots—it may have been anything. But suddenly I was home-sick. With a deep ache for the people and things of home, so far away, I crept back to bed and slept and dreamt of home, like any schoolboy on his first night away.

* * * * *

Two days later I was in Shanghai. The modern Pekin-Shanghai express had rushed me past interminable paddy-fields to the coast. I took a rickshaw to the bank. Two hundred dollars—that was what awaited me. It seemed wealth enough, but it had to last a long time and take me a long way. Yet I "splashed" a day or two in a good hotel. It was the cockroaches that decided me. A fellow-traveller in the train had told me fearsome tales of Chinese hotels—they were probably exaggerated, but the combination of "funds" and a fear of cockroaches drove me to a Western hotel.

The lounge, complete with comfortable chairs, appropriate tables, reception office and telephones, made me feel distressingly at home. As I had fled in Tokyo, so I now fled in Shanghai.

"Boy!" I shouted, "take me to the native quarters—to the old China Town!"

I took refuge again in a rickshaw. Not that I ever

got really used to using another human being as a means of transport. I could never comfortably look at man in the light of a horse, but it was the easiest and cheapest way about. It was half-past eight. A lovely evening. Swaying with the rhythm of the rickshaw—fascinated by the rippling play of muscles on the naked back of the trotting coolie—I went out to see Shanghai.

The Orient still seemed leagues away. The roads were good. The side-walks paved. The streets were well-lit and patrolled by policemen of all nations. Each concession had its own kind. There were "gendarmes" in pale blue, bearded Sikhs in turbans, huge Russians and a few Chinese policemen. We went across the modern bridge over the Whangpoo River. Thousands of sampans and Chinese junks swarmed below us, all lashed together. The inhabitants of the floating village were cooking their evening meals over little charcoal fires which twinkled in the sterns of most of the boats. The sweating coolie kept up his running trot, through the French Concession, then down through the streets of many women. To the rickshaw boy the "native quarters" had come to mean one thing. Girls, known to the Chinese as "Kha boo," meaning "wild chickens," were everywhere. Some were dressed in yellow robes and some nearly nude. The Chinese girls, in most cases, turned away at the sight of a white man. Their distaste was evident. But there were others. Europeans, mostly Russians, or various Eurasian mixtures, beckoned eagerly from doorways and windows. Some were very beautiful. Most were not. Some were positively repulsive, with black teeth and red betel-nut coloured mouths. The streets were crowded. The whole atmosphere was exciting, but rather horrible. My rickshaw boy did his best—but on we went. He was still intoning "Nice girl—wannee nice girl!" several streets later.

We crossed a last tram-line. Then came a plunge. The streets became alley-ways, narrowed and over-

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crowded. They zigzagged at right angles almost every hundred yards. Dimly lit by old-fashioned kerosene lamps, the flaunting banners covered with Chinese hieroglyphics almost met overhead, turning the lane into a dark tunnel. A million Chinese were packed into the smelly hovels that lay on either side. In many places, as we approached, the pedestrian had to take refuge in doorways to let us pass. Runners dashed round corners carrying huge burdens. The more unwieldy the burden the faster they ran. They shouted warnings as they sped along, but as everyone else was shouting at the same time collisions were avoided only by miracles, which ceased to be miracles after about the twentieth time. Even though the coolie carried a load twice as big as himself he still persisted in shouting "Hi! hi! hi!" until his panting call died away in the distance or was swallowed up in louder nearer yells.

If these streets were dark the shops and narrow booths were darker. As each street was concerned with one trade only the general noise took on a different note in different streets. The already terrific din rose to a crescendo in the brass-workers' district with the pounding of a hundred hammers. Just as musical and not so noisy was the street of money changers and bankers, where thousands of brass "cash" rattled on the tables and in the quick hands of cashiers. Next came the street of the shoemakers, and then the comparative quiet of the silversmiths.

The street became wider and opened out into a small square. Here there was a native bazaar—lines of small shops and stalls—a colourful and lively scene. Shrill Chinese music sounded on all sides. Lithe-flanked rickshaw boys, dripping with perspiration, their nude backs shining in the light of naphtha flares and sooty shop lamps, went swinging along pulling Chinese girls in exquisite brocaded mandarin coats. I sat in my

rickshaw partly hidden and watched the swarming life of China pass.

Then we went on again. In the hundreds of little shops work was ending. Some people sat eating their evening meal in their workshops. Others had already spread their grass sleeping mats upon the bare floor. One by one the sliding door panels closed. Sleeping bodies, mostly without any covering at all, lay in grotesque attitudes in the dark corners.

We were in a mysterious looking alley—narrow enough to be touched on both sides. The light was far ahead. Hordes of people surged by. We came to a roofless enclosure leading off the alley-way. I left the rickshaw and walked on alone. There were literally thousands of Chinese sleeping on the ground. The oily, sweating bodies of men and boys gleamed in the half light. I walked among them stepping over sprawling bodies. Sometimes they looked up with a smile. One poor devil seemed to have forgotten how to smile. I bent down and placed a handful of the Chinese "cash" from my pocket beside him. He smiled then and that helped. These poor devils of coolies have so little to hope for from life . . .

The hour was almost midnight. Into the rickshaw again I called for "home." We set off at a good speed back into the twisting maze of narrow streets. As we went down one particularly dark street my boy called out to a number of rickshaw coolies about half a block behind us. They dashed up and surrounded me. None had passengers. All were yelling in their native tongue—a wolfish-looking gang. It looked bad. In a flash I jumped out of the rickshaw in front of the mob and was off into the middle of the streets before I could be rushed into a darker passage that lay beside us. Running on until I reached a lighted street I found a native policeman who engaged another rickshaw for me.

We crossed the Whangpoo river again by the same

bridge. The sheets of matting were drawn up in a half-circle over the river-dwellers in their "sampan." They slept stretched out in peace. The morning would bring them only another gruelling struggle for existence. But now they slept. And very soon I slept too.

The next evening provided a striking contrast. An acquaintance made in the Shanghai express invited me to dinner. So in the historic dining-room of the Astor House Hotel, with a soft stringed orchestra playing, and soft-footed waiters anticipating every wish, I looked round at the notable people present—and thought of those unbelievable streets, less than a mile away. My host and his English friends raised quizzical eyebrows when I mentioned my experience. White men, they said, never go to the native city after dark—or if they do . . . they seldom return. Perhaps it was true. Either way it was obviously something that "wasn't done." Not wishing to embarrass my host I kept quiet. But my thoughts wandered frequently away from the Astor House and back again to those dark alleys.

Hong Kong provided the same contrast. There was the Anglicized section, where the solid buildings, their upper stories projecting over the sidewalks, supported by heavy square pillars, provided shade for lean-faced English civilians in white suits and for the English Tommies in their khaki. On either side lay the Chinese districts. The streets were narrow and noisy. The Chinese, overcrowded in their houses, did everything on the sidewalk. Rickshaw boys pushed their shouting way between the coolies gobbling rice as they sat on their haunches almost in the middle of the street. Even the cooking-stoves were brought out on to the sidewalk. Foul odours of cooking and clouds of smoke rose into the general confusion. Women pushed their way through with their babies strapped to their backs.

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I left the Chinese city and climbed laboriously up to the Peak to look down on a beautiful expanse of inland sea, where the great ocean liners at anchor looked like toys below. I came down one of the curving roads that ran downhill through beautiful palm groves. Past the pleasant tropical homes of British officials and wealthy merchants, I came down again to Bedlam.

Having two days to wait for a boat to Singapore I decided to have a look at the Monte Carlo of the Orient. At the back of my mind was a vague hope that the luck that had attended me so far might condescend to follow me to the gambling dens of Macao. The main reason was that one of the two days of my compulsory stay was a Sunday. It was a pretty dull sort of day in Hong Kong. But in Macao it was *the* day of the week. The Hong Kong business houses were closed. Excursion rates prevailed for the crowds who went over on the steamer to the fan-tan houses.

Macao is a Portuguese colony, thirty-five miles distant on the mainland. It would be entirely unimportant but for the fact that the Portuguese not only allow but offer every encouragement to the thousands of Chinese and to any of the tourists and Europeans who wish to gamble. Macao is like Monte Carlo in that it exists almost solely on its gambling. But the resemblance stops there. In every other respect it is quite unlike the Principality. It is tawdry, dirty and smelly. There are more than a dozen fan-tan dives, opium houses galore, and an unknown quantity of brothels. The Chinese are inveterate gamblers. Every day the British steamer *Sui An* leaves her berth at Hong Kong carrying hundreds of Chinese and a sprinkling of Europeans. The Sunday excursions are crowded to capacity.

The thirty-five-mile crossing takes the steamer through seas that have been the haunt of pirates for hundreds of years. Even in the present day pirate junks are not

unknown, and precautions are taken to keep the Chinese passengers under control in case a few score pirates come aboard as "passengers."

We got safely over—in fact we made a very merry party at luncheon on board. We disembarked and scattered to the various gambling houses in the quaint little port. The understanding was that we had to return at seven when the ship's siren sounded if we wanted to get back to Hong Kong that night. I went up into the gallery of the Foo-Chow house. There I sat between a lordly Chinese gentleman in quiet silk and a fat Portuguese lady in rustling silk. Down below was a swarming crowd of coolies. In the balcony sat the wealthier and, generally speaking, cleaner people. Our bets were placed in a basket and lowered by an attendant down to the croupier, or "foki." That bored gentleman sat with lowered eyelids at one end of the table. By his side was a bowl covering a pile of "cash"—that is, those small Chinese copper coins with a hole in the middle. Fan-tan is simple. The "foki" merely removes the "cash" from the pile after he has lifted the bowl. He rakes the coins away four at a time—four and four and four and four, until only the last four or a lesser number is left. The betting is on the number, up to four, which is left each time. Simple as it sounds it is a fascinating gamble.

As the "foki" reduced the pile the sharp-eyed and excited coolies below gauged the final number before the last few fours had been raked away. Between each "game" attendants came round offering tea and cakes "on the house." Steaming hot towels were also provided free for those whose excitement caused them to perspire unduly.

I had taken the precaution of taking only fifty dollars with me. With all my hopes of running my funds up to an amount sufficient to finance me round the world I wasn't prepared to "blue" the lot. For a couple of

hours I played cautiously. The basket must have gone up and down twenty times before I found myself with only five dollars left. I went out for a breath of fresh air. I walked about the town, cursing a bit and whistling a bit. I stopped in front of a Chinese tea-shop and listened to the sing-song girls. I refused a dozen offers by rickshaw boys of the other "attractions" of Macao. Everything was on offer, from girls of any nationality to the various "exhibitions" mentioned in sibilant whispers by the rickshaw boys. A beachcomber—a thin, timid-looking man—sidled up to me asking for a "hand-out."

"Could you spare a few coppers for a cup of coffee, Mate?"

I gave him a dollar. It was worth it to see his face light up. He gave me some advice.

"Go on, mate," he said, "chuck your last few dollars on as though you don't care if they never come back, and you'll win—see? You've got your ticket back any way."

Before taking his advice I went into several other establishments. I watched a combination of "fan-tan" called "faan." I watched doll-like Chinese women losing their money at "ching." Then, with an hour to go before the *Sui An* was due to leave, I went back to the Foo-Chow balcony. I put my four dollars on four. It came off. I tried again and won. When the siren sounded I had settled down to the exciting business of winning back my money. As the time approached I had got sixty dollars, then eighty. The siren sounded. I tried one more go—and lost. I let one more game decide for me whether I stayed on or whether I returned that night in the *Sui An*. It was a two, and I had backed three. So, clutching my precious winnings, I got to the steamer as the gangway was going up. Only a quick jump saved me from a night in Macao.

The next day I sailed for Singapore.

CHAPTER IX

HONKY-TONK

A LAZY haze hung over the sea and masked our approach to Singapore. It dulled the fierce heat of the tropical sun and made the deck a pleasant spot instead of a roasting expanse. It was with a great thrill that I watched a grey cloud looming out of the fog and learned that it was the island of Singapore.

For the reputation of Singapore had travelled faster and further than I had. It was the "Gateway of the East," the "Centre of the Orient," the "wickedest city in the world." A member of the English Parliament had even gone so far as to call it the "Cesspool of the East"—in the House of Commons, too! All I knew was that it had been underlined in red ink in all of the various lists of "places to be seen some day" which had decorated my school-books. The name had conjured up visions of malarial swamps and palm groves and all the exciting and colourful life of a Far East dockyard. Later my romantic ideas had been reinforced and embellished by various authors until I could see the famous Malay street, filled with dens of iniquity—the Honky-tonk houses, where life was bought and sold cheaply; where women and tropical passion combined to make the rest of the world seem tame; where sin and shame marched together in a riot of colourful excitement to which the sailors of the whole world contributed.

The reality was different. It always is. In fact, it took me several days to find out the romance and the excitement that did actually lurk behind a most respect-

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able exterior. First of all I found a well-governed and policed British Colony, with crime almost non-existent. The famous Malay Street was a clean native residential section. The movies, dancing (in dress clothes), and a respectable, although lively and interesting, racecourse, were the most obvious excitements of the European population. The breezy atmosphere of Portsmouth dockyard had been transplanted to the great naval dockyard at Singapore. It was an atmosphere a little too severe and chilly for tropical romances, even though the town was rather apt to ignore the existence of the naval docks, five miles away across what were malarial swamps not long ago.

Stepping from the awning of the deck into the mid-morning sunshine of Singapore had been a dazzling experience. I had travelled from Hong Kong as a deck-passenger on an American freighter. I needed to economize. I wanted to stay, for a day or two at least, at the Raffles Hotel. It was another boyhood ambition. So a deck-passenger I became. The old captain, like the Russian captain, appreciated an audience. I was prepared to listen to his stories—he was prepared to lend me a canvas cot and to make my life much more comfortable. Not that we ever struck such a bargain. Oh dear no! But he couldn't keep coming down to the crowded native deck—there was no other listener available except the mate and the chief engineer, who knew all the answers—so he yarned, and I sprawled in comfort near the bridge.

He did me another good turn, too. He had been to Bali. Towards the end of each voyage, so the chief engineer told me, the captain always threatened to run away to land—so long as the land was Bali. His vocabulary, expressive enough on most matters, completely failed him when he talked of Bali. But he said enough to make me determined to go there, whatever happened. For the captain himself, despite his dreams

of that lovely island, had been threatening to run away to Bali for the last twenty years. Yet each voyage found him back on the bridge. I wasn't going to let anything stop me.

Meanwhile there was Singapore—until another freighter, a Dutchman, was available to take me to Sourabaya, the nearest jumping-off ground for the Paradise of Bali.

A policeman directed me to the Raffles Hotel. . . . I was surprised to find that the dominant feature of the town was very definitely Chinese. I might have stepped ashore at Hong Kong again or Shanghai. The streets were lined with shops bearing Chinese names either in English or Chinese characters. In the roads off the main thoroughfares lived thousands upon thousands of Chinese in crowded tenements. Chinese children swarmed everywhere. From nearly every window in those crowded side-streets bamboo poles projected with the blue and white of a Chinese wash-day waving bravely in the breeze until it really looked as though they had got all the flags out for me. A pair of blue Chinese pants from an upper storey, caught in a strong gust of wind, came floating down into a shop below, nearly winding themselves around my head as they fell. A tiny tot of a Chinese boy came out from an alley-way to retrieve them. Nobody bothered. Even the shop-keeper hardly troubled to look up.

The streets were seething with life. The noise must have seemed heavenly to the noise-loving Chinese. I found out later that it wasn't the Chinese who made the noise, however, but the Malay drivers of motor vehicles. They have a button on a bulb in front of them that operates a hooter, and they see no reason at all for not using it to the full, and then some. One taxi driver in a rank was lying back in his seat at ease with his foot on the hooter button, apparently talking in Morse or merely trying to outrival for noise the man in the rank

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on the other side of the road. Bicycles, rickshaws, motor-vehicles galore, competed for the road with bullock-drawn carts and native push-carts and barrows. And when I say competed I mean just that. For native drivers, pushers, and runners alike seemed to have only the most rudimentary idea of the rules of the road. Shrieking brakes added an exciting chorus to the general din.

Despite all the distractions of the Chinese section I soon made my way along to a water-front lined with broad drive-ways and big European buildings. The Raffles was quite easy to find—a big building facing the harbour. When I came in sight of its veranda, filled with English people, girls in silken summer frocks, men in spotless white linen, in laughing, talking groups round wicker tables on which were cards or magazines and the inevitable whisky-stengahs, I realized my mistake in walking, fascinating though the walk had been. I had pressed my clothes and had acquired an air of respectability with a sun-helmet and a camera. But the Sikh gateman—a smart man with a beard, and a sash across his shoulders, who spent his life saluting the guests as they passed—looked a bit askance at me as I entered. I noticed a lady on the veranda raise her lorgnette. However, although feeling a bit hot and bothered, I went in boldly and booked a room. But the first thing I did was to send out for some white ducks. Travelling as a deck-passenger doesn't leave much scope for frills, and the Raffles was—well, the Raffles. When, after a marvellous bath, I went down to the barber for a shave, I began to realize the enormity of my entry. The barber had a stiff two days' growth to take off. No wonder the lorgnette had been lifted!

My usual curiosity soon took me into some of the queerer corners of Singapore. On the second day, when the bloom was already off my new ducks and I had begun to look twice at each dollar—a proceeding



I WANDERED INTO THE CHINESE TOWN

which took the bloom off the Raffles—I decided that honour was satisfied. I had seen and stayed, if I hadn't exactly conquered. So I packed up my rucksack again and went down to the harbour. There were still three days to wait for my boat.

I walked along the edge of the harbour. Looking out to sea it was obvious that Singapore was "half-way house" for the Orient—a junction for the world's shipping. It was also true, although I could see no signs of it at that moment, that it was one of the most important air-ports between Europe, Australia and the Far East. Beyond the hundreds of Chinese junks that lined the beach and raised a forest of masts to the sky, were dozens of steamers, flying the flags of all the nations. There were big liners bound for 'Frisco, for Hong Kong, Australia, Suez and London. Tramps and cargo steamers used Singapore as a port of call on their way to New Guinea, the Philippines, Papua, Borneo, Tasmania, the Carolines, Macassar, Rangoon, and a hundred other places, across the Java Sea, the China Seas, the Sunda Sea, the Aratura Sea, the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific.

I left the wide avenues and big hotels. I crossed the Singapore River, where the sampans filled the water from side to side with a blaze of colour and life. Men of every nation and every race passed over the bridge. There were Hindus in turbans, Japanese in kimonos, Malaysians in sarongs, bearded Sikhs, Filipinos, dark-skinned Tamils, happy Burmese and Javanese, while here, there and everywhere was the ubiquitous John Chinaman, in silk brocades, or more often in the blue pants of coolies and rickshaw boys. It was a most interesting and exciting procession. Yet apart from the people it might have been any big city, anywhere.

I wandered into the Chinese town with thousands of pink, yellow or green two-storied houses in tidy rows. A notice took me to the door of a small lodging house

kept by a French woman. I applied for a room. "You got any money," she demanded. I showed her a little. Then she thawed out and took me upstairs to a room that was at least clean. She explained the brusqueness of her opening remarks. Singapore at that time was full of disreputable hobos—beachcombers—men who had let their ships sail without them or men from the mines or rubber estates. There were a good many of them, victims of the slump, unable to get another job. They couldn't take the lower class jobs because no white man would employ another white in a menial capacity—not merely because a Chinese would probably do it better, but because it wasn't done: white prestige must be preserved. All the other jobs were a closed book—vacancies were filled by men from England on contract. The out-of-work white, even though on the spot, was not considered. They were reduced to begging, until eventually they worked a passage home or were sent home by the Government. Sad experience had taught my new landlady that even white ducks, a sun helmet and a camera were no guarantee, in that part of the town, that there was any money in the pocket.

Still in search of adventure or of anything unusual, I wandered into a water-front saloon in search of a meal. It was a long, narrow room with the bar in the centre, and a dilapidated piano as the sole ornament. Several seedy-looking individuals lounged around. Beer rings garnished the plain wooden tables. I was in Chan Lak's bar, and Chan Lak himself came hurrying forward, rubbing his hands together and bowing. He soon produced a bowl of chop-suey, and I set to.

As I finished, one of the group of loungers strolled over as though to talk. I motioned him to sit down and offered him a drink. He pulled back a chair and waved a hand to Chan. Like an automatic machine Chan produced two whisky-stengahs. He knew his man.

HONKY-TONK

"You're a new one, aren't you, chum?" the stranger asked.

"Yes," I admitted, "I am."

"Well, take my tip," he said, "and clear out while the going's good—while you've got some money left."

He was Irish—rather aggressively so, but a very likeable sort of roughneck. We got on well. He insisted on regarding me as a fellow down-and-out who had got a few dollars left, and he loaded me up with good advice. Some of his tough pals came over to our table and Chan Lak was busy bringing whisky-stengahs—it was my party apparently. The whole gang seemed to make their living in the same way—begging from any of their compatriots—from the Governor downwards—but apparently they did eventually intend to get a ship, if they could.

Chan's became busier. Someone sat down to the battered piano, someone else produced a banjo. A crowd of sailors from the wharves looked in. My new pals were in their element. They were the permanent residents, so to speak, and achieved a certain licence and some free food and drink from Chan Lak by acting as touts for the Happy Tar, as the saloon was called. They used to go on board each ship as it arrived and bring the crew along. Every other saloon in Singapore was no good—the Happy Tar was the place. This particular trio had a fine line in sales-talk—couched in the most bloodthirsty and obscene language—and they certainly brought trade to Chan Lak.

The leader was Dapper Dan, the Irishman who spoke to me first. Then came a Scandinavian stoker, usually called "the Swede." Last and most formidable of the three was Ironfoot Joe, who humped around the world with one leg shorter than the other—a shark in the Timor Sea had done that for him. He made up the difference with an iron support which was reported to have laid out more men in rough-houses than even Dan's great

ham of a fist. The three composed Chan Lak's unofficial bodyguard, chuckers out, and touts. I was in good company. Chan Lak himself was a clever Chinaman. A steady stream of dollars went away from the Happy Tar to various Celestial banks and enterprises. He owned a car and a nice house away from the waterfront. But every morning early he was back working in his undershirt, straightening up for a day that only ended in the early hours of the next morning. His customers as often as not called him a "bloody Chink," but the little Chinese banks in the side streets knew his real worth. And he was typical of the importance of the Chinese in the commercial life of Singapore. From rickshaw boy to millionaire—that was the achievement of one man. A surprising number of the humble Chinese were following in the same direction. They bore the lordly strutting and the abuse of the lowest "white man" with philosophic patience, so long as the money was going into the right cash-box.

All this, and more, I learnt later. Meanwhile the saloon was getting crowded and gay. Ironfoot Joe was getting blasphemously excited about a tale of a fight in Mindanao. The Swede kept interrupting. Then Dan started and shut them both up. A whole crowd piled round our table to listen. He told funny stories and sad stories and tales of strange ports. With a good story under way, old Dapper Dan was as happy as a sandboy. His smiling face exuded goodwill to all men. "He's got a heart as big as a beer-barrel," whispered the Swede to me, "until he reaches up to here," and he indicated his neck. "Then you'd best look out." But while he was good he was very good. We listened for an hour or more. To tales of Nigger Bay and Danger Island; to sad stories of brown sweethearts left in lovely Mariana and Macassar; to romantic stories of Tongatabu and Tokelau. Then someone picked up the banjo and started to strum. In a few moments we were all singing.

The piano started up as well. Couples began waltzing round the room, clearing a space by the simple process of knocking over any tables in their way. The men whose seats and drinks went flying not unnaturally objected—a free fight began.

But not for long—Chan Lak hurried forward, patted the combatants on the back. Dapper Dan backed him up, although spoiling for a fight himself. Chan “set ‘em up” for all round—a free drink on the house. Order was restored. Tables were cleared away, and a space left for the dancers. Soon there came a demand for women partners. Chan was yelled for. “Come on, you bloody Chink, get us some partners!” But Chan could or would not. The police would object.

“Hell to that!” shouted a sooty, greasy stoker, and aimed a wild blow at Chan. Along came Dapper Dan, peeling off his coat. A neatly-dressed steward, tight as an owl, stepped in his way. Crash! down he went. A big, square-jawed bucko of a Scandinavian mate was served in the same way. Ironfoot Joe started up from his corner, but three bluejackets pulled him down and sat on his head. “You keep out of it,” they yelled, grinning with joy. A huge great spar of a man, from a four-master in the bay, rose up and downed the Dapper with a mighty flail. The Swede came out of his dreams and floored the brute in his turn. Poor Chan—fearful for his furniture and his licence—rushed impotently to and fro, his fear for his property struggling with his Chinaman’s hatred of physical violence. Someone threw an uproarious “middie” over the bar. Bottles rocked and crashed. Coloured liquids dripped from the shelves or splashed across the floor. Everyone, down to the quiet old captain in the corner, was joining in. I decided that discretion was certainly the better part of valour, and made for the door. The crowds of excited and grinning Hindus and Chinese round the doorway made way with difficulty. Before I was through, a crowd of sailors

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returning from the red-light district just up the hill, swept in with an excited rush that carried me back to the centre of the fray.

Someone gripped me by the shoulder. "Come on, you sinner—you're a Yankee; let's give these Limeys something to remember!" I was sufficiently excited by then, and had received a few stray blows that demanded some return. I went right in. At that moment the police arrived, cleared the crowd from the doorway, and rushed in. Six bearded Sikhs and a British officer soon put an end to things, but not before Dapper Dan had grabbed my arm and pushed me into the rush for the back door. Jammed in a narrow passage, I was tripped up, fell, and received a hefty kick in the forehead.

When I woke up Chan was pulling me out of a stair cupboard into which I had been pushed in the rush. He and Dan were alone in the kitchen of a deserted saloon. Ironfoot Joe had gone off to jail with several others—the rest had scattered. The police officer had threatened to take Chan's licence if he didn't keep the beachcombers out of his premises and stop making himself a "perishing nuisance." Dan bathed my head, while Chan counted up his cash and his losses. The damage, despite appearances, was slight, while the cash was considerable. He wasn't worried overmuch. It was all in the day's work.

CHAPTER X

THE WIFE OF KEDERA

KEDERA was the finest fisherman along a coast of fine fishermen. And it was all because, as he told me, he knew the "asal"—the origin—of every fish that swam. In those waters there was an amazing variety of fish, some repulsive, some just queer, and some beautiful. Kedera knew the secret of them all.

"Isn't the sole half of a fish that Mahommed threw back into the ocean?" he asked almost fiercely.

I nodded, and tried to look as though I had always known. So he told me of the fish with bones and flesh as fine and as white as a rabbit's. He has tasted it and it was good. He knew how to catch the slippery eel, but to him it was only the stem of the sacred and sinuous gli-gli plant. He knew fish that moved like cows, with slow, steady gait; fish that darted like butterflies; and fish that were reincarnations of birds and seagulls.

Before ever he threw a net, Kedera would toss a handful of mangrove leaves into the water. He knew the right words to say over them to turn them into fish for his "jala-net." But there were other things he knew which he wasn't so keen to boast about. For he knew how, by poking out the eyes of a certain fish, to bring sudden blindness on his enemies. Or, by cutting off its head, to bring death and destruction to any one he hated. Altogether Kedera knew a lot. But such knowledge was dangerous. The gods of the river were jealous gods. But Kedera gave me two peaceful and interesting days.

After the scrap at the Happy Tar I had crawled back to my French landlady with an aching head. Her sharp

scrutiny and earlier suspicion gave way to kindness and sympathy when she saw the state I was in. She even produced a salve, made from some ancient recipe, which certainly soothed my wound. I decided quite definitely, however, that the two days left in Singapore were not going to be as exciting as that particular day. As we had approached Singapore on the boat from Hong Kong, a sailor had kindly drawn my attention to a quaint Malay fishing village nestling under the lee of Pulau Brani. The palm-thatched houses stood on stilts at the edge of the sea. He explained that this curious village was inhabited by the direct descendants of the famous Chinese and Malay pirates, once known and feared as the "Orang Loots."

In the heyday of piracy, these brown-skinned buccaners were real scourges of the sea. Their thirty-oared "prahus" set out from all the little coastal villages. The old-fashioned Chinese junks, whenever their red-brown quaint sails hung lifeless, waiting for a breeze, were fair game. Even the largest merchantman was not safe, when becalmed in the Straits of Malacca or when at anchor off a trading settlement along the coast. The crews were soon overpowered by the bloodthirsty pirates, massacred or carried into slavery. Five or six "prahus" would combine for an assault, if necessary, to make up a force of nearly two hundred fierce fighters.

Until the advent of steamboats the pirates captured many a rich prize and rowed back to their "kampangs" loaded with booty to delight the lovely and gentle Malay maidens awaiting their return. The first steamboat gave them a nasty shock. The encounter was not without a certain humour—for the inlooker. For the pirates it was disaster. For the soft-eyed Malayan women waiting in the little coastal village it was a tragic mystery.

Five "prahus" rowed out into the Straits, out into the open sea. A paddle-steamer, the *Diana*, lay apparently becalmed. To the one hundred and fifty Malays bending

to their oars she seemed like a gift from heaven. The ship was not merely becalmed—she was on fire. Or so they, in their sublime ignorance, imagined. Joyously they pulled towards her. As the first boat drew near, the pirates probably had a momentary qualm. The crew of the ship were all on deck—anything but frightened. Their calm assurance was the last thing the pirates ever noticed. A single broadside sent the “prahu” and her thirty or forty occupants to the bottom. Then, to the horror of the rest of the gang, the ship they had thought to be helpless began to move towards them. Against the wind, too. They had little time to think about it. They turned and rowed furiously away. One by one they were overhauled and sunk. Not a man returned to tell the tale. But the news of the new steam-boats soon spread. The pirates found that fishing was a safer life, although for years afterwards occasional junks and sailing-ships disappeared as mysteriously as the five “prahus” had disappeared. The “Orang Loots” and all the other pirate gangs found that it was possible for a little while longer to combine piracy with fishing, but the piracy was a very half-hearted affair after the business of the *Diana*. To-day, the sailor informed me, it was all fishing and no piracy.

The descendants of those fierce pirates evidently felt that they still had a reputation to live up to.

“Oh! Those people . . . not let you land,” said an almost naked urchin to me when I tried to bargain with him to row me across the bay in the rickety boat that had replaced the ancient “prahu”; “say no tourists.”

“Nertz to that,” I retorted, “I’m no tourist. I’m a big-game hunter. I’ve escaped bandits and crossed deserts. A village of pirate descendants won’t worry me after that.”

I handed over a bar of chocolate—a certain bribe in any part of the world to anyone of his age. Then I related some of my exploits and made up some more,

until Trader Horn seemed only an amateur. When I had finished he was more than won over.

"Jump in—shooter of elephants," he cried with a boyish grin; and off we went. The oars nearly dwarfed him, but we got along. Three times we were stuck on mud flats, in stagnant water so thick that even a stone would hardly sink.

Our arrival was heralded by the shrill cries of a couple of dozen pot-bellied kiddies, naked from the feet up. Another big bar of chocolate and a few coppers worked miracles. My guide led me along narrow bridges of wooden slats that ran above the water and between the houses, supported on poles pushed well into the mud. The houses themselves were built on stilts, made of green and rotting piles. With considerable sense my guide took me to the house of Kedera. Not only was he the best fisherman, but he was the most travelled of all that primitive community, and the only one who spoke English. My pot-bellied escort dropped behind one by one as they found that no more coins or chocolate were forthcoming, but my guide, who lived further along the bay, remained.

The house we sought stood in Parit Number Tiga, the Third Gutter—just as one might say Third Avenue. It squatted over the water on shell-encrusted legs, and we reached it, as it was low tide, by wading. I waited on the house ladder, while my guide inquired for Kedera. There was a vista of more pile-built houses, of dove-cotes on long legs. There was a most amusing elevated duck-yard, with bamboo steps up which the ducks were climbing as I watched. All those domestic accessories, which in drier parts of the world clutter up a back-yard, were here suspended with considerable ingenuity over the water and under the house. Hanging from the piles and from the floor were jars and bamboo fish-traps; nets and spears and baskets of all the queerest shapes. Tied to the ladder, like a waiting automobile, was a primitive dug-out canoe.

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Then Kedera appeared and welcomed me in. He apologized for keeping me waiting, but he had been at his prayers. I saw later the tiny detached platform on the other side of the house where he kept his praying-mat. He invited me to stay the night and have a full day's fishing with him. So very willingly I found myself part of a Malayan fisherman's household. My urchin of a guide went away quite impressed. He probably repeats to this day some of the stories I had told him.

Meanwhile the tide had been coming in. Kedera offered to take me to see the Chinese way of fishing. It was too late to start anything that day. So we climbed into the primitive dugout, which proved to be anything but primitive when handled by Kedera. We paddled further down the bay away from the river, and tied up at a beach below another village. A heavy rowing boat, pulled by Chinamen in blue pants and great straw hats, approached and anchored near the shore. Several of the crew jumped out. From the loaded boat they hauled length after length of netting with cork floats at regular intervals. Some of the men hauled one end of the net to the beach beside us. Others jumped back into the boat, paying out the net as they pulled away. Round in a semicircle they went, a quarter of a mile out into the bay. The semicircle complete, they anchored the boat, all got out and waded ashore at the further end of the beach with the remainder of the net. Then came the tug-of-war. Up to their armpits in the water, they hauled in the net with straining muscles. When the last of the net was ashore and shaken out, a huge pile of fish remained for sorting. They repeated the laborious process. The pile grew. We left them to it.

We sat on the ladder of the house and talked and smoked. I learnt a lot about Kedera. It was a happy, carefree life he led. He had no need of the dry land. His women went out daily for the fish the sun dried on his roof. He himself only went fishing when he felt like it.

He had his house-ladder to sit on and the streaming and twisting of the water to watch. When the tide ebbed away his skin seemed to get dry. Then he would slip into the water and swim away seawards. Down his narrow street wandered long lines of yellow mangrove pods, with leaves and twigs from the distant jungles at the head of the river. Sometimes a great blundering clump of uprooted nipah-palms buffeted the piles of his house like a drunken man on his way home.

A Chinese vendor of sweetmeats glided along under and between the houses, offering his sticky mixtures in a sing-song voice. A clumsy six-oared "pakarangan" pushed its way through, with a Hindu salesman balanced precariously in the prow, nearly smothered in the bright colours of the Indian cloth he held up for sale. The wife of Kedera and the other women looked up hopefully as the boat passed, but Kedera puffed away at his pipe, determined to see nothing. The women bent down again over the water. They were fishing in the shallows with baskets and dip nets for the evening meal, their sarongs clinging damply to their lower limbs, their brown bodies bare from the waist upwards.

Soon the peaceful silence was broken by the voices of returning fishermen. Smoke from cooking-fires curled round the houses, escaping from every crevice in the palm-thatched roofs. After a meal of fish and rice I slept well, lulled to sleep by the lapping of the tide round the long piers of the house.

Next morning we were away early for the most peaceful, pleasant and most productive day's fishing I have ever had, before or since. In the Malay style of fishing there was nothing of the laborious Chinese method. It was simplicity and ease combined. Kedera had a trap made from a large number of long poles, cut from the mangrove swamps. These were set in the seabed in a broad V-shape, a great bag-net occupying the apex of the V. We tied the boat to one of the stakes

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after Kedera had re-set the net. Then we lay down in the dugout, one at each end, and smoked and yarned until the tide went down. Then we found that the poles to which the net was tied were bowed down, like a laden fruit-tree, with a great weight of fish. The smaller fish went back with a happy splash and the quick flick of a tiny tail. The larger fish and the great crabs were laid tenderly in the bottom of the boat. We did go along the coast a little way and up the river in a half-hearted search for more exciting fishing. Kedera wanted to show me his prowess at spearing fish. But the sun was hot, the boat was heavy with fish, and we were soon content just to paddle lazily back to the little brown home on stilts.

Again we sat on the bamboo steps, watching the river whirling and swirling below us. Again the evening silence was broken by the sounds of returning fishermen. The wife of Kedera returned from the shore with a jar of oil poised on her head. As she went out again she said a few words in Malay to her husband, at which he shrugged his shoulders. He relit his pipe and slid a little further down his ladder into the warm water, as a man in his club might ease himself deeper into his armchair. In a quiet voice between puffs at his long pipe, he told me something of his own story. I settled myself comfortable on the porch to listen.

"In the old days, Tuan," he began, "I traded in the head-waters of the great river. Right up among the Buludupics, a fierce race, who were descendants of the Evil One. But their women were famed far and wide for their beauty." He sighed regretfully as he thought of those days. "I used to paddle up the great river in my dugout taking a load of coloured cloths and beads and salt. At every 'kampang' I left some goods, receiving in return a promise of a bundle of rattans, some skins, a bag of medicine bark, or a catty of beeswax. It was hard paddling, but my load got lighter and lighter

the further I went, and I took my time. After perhaps a month I would be as far up as it was safe to go. Then my last length of cloth went to a village where they made me a raft—a large raft. On that I floated down in comfort, only paddling into the shore as I reached each ‘kampang.’ The grateful villagers piled my raft high with the goods they had promised. So I floated down to the mouth of the great river and the Chinese shop where I had got my trading goods on credit. Those were good days. Sometimes I made a hundred dollars a trip.”

Kedera sighed and eased himself up one rung of the bamboo ladder.

“And that, Tuan,” he said, “was how I got my wife. Even though it was my last trip.” And his eyes shone at the memory.

“I had gone further up than ever before. Everything had gone well. The villagers were preparing me a raft for all the rattan and beeswax I had been promised. But the Raja of the village died, and everything was stopped for the two weeks’ feast that was their custom. I had to stop, too. When the feasting was over, they selected from the women of the village the most beautiful of them all to accompany the Raja on his long journey into the next world.

“She was seated on a throne in the village long-house. Next to her, propped up on his throne, was the cold body of the Raja. Her relatives all crowded round, praising her good fortune, but watching all the time in case she escaped. She sat there, staring with frightened eyes at the dead Raja, not heeding their words. The people all sat round on their mats for the final ceremonies. I went outside to think. She was a beautiful girl. It thrilled my heart to look on her.

“At last I returned. I placed my mat where she could see me. I caught her eye at last and smiled. As she looked at me I took out my betel-box and pressed the

catch. The lid flew open. Again I made the sign, until the colour began to return to her cheeks and I knew she understood. Her family must have seen something, too, for her brother and her father came and sat by me. I offered them some betel, wishing it were poisoned. They refused, but they would not let me out of their sight.

"That night they took the body of the Raja. Beside the dead man they bound the living girl. They laid them down on the length of coloured cloth that was to pay for my raft. Side by side in the bottom of a boat they lay. Then gently the boat was launched while the whole village watched. I had seen it happen before when Rajahs had died, but I was not there to see it that time."

"Quietly as I left the village, there was one who followed me—her brother—jealous for the honour of his house. I twisted and turned along jungle paths. Still he followed. There was only one way. I drew my kris and turned and faced him. Silently we fought in that lonely jungle path in the darkness. But I had speared fish for nearly as many years as he had drawn breath. A swift lunge. My kris found its mark. I rushed away to where my dugout was hidden in the mangroves by the river, a mile below the village.

"Faintly in the distance I could still hear the drums beating. It was not yet time. The fireflies settled on my arm, so still I sat. The branches over my head creaked. Large and flaming eyes looked down on me. The crocodiles moved along the mud-banks—they could smell a man. A hundred times my heart leapt at the shadow of a floating log. A little time before the dawn broke the drums ceased. At long last I saw that for which I waited go slipping past, behind it a line of black snouts—a dozen following crocodiles.

"In a moment I was out in the stream. A few strokes and I was alongside, stiffness, fear, and everything forgotten. The lovely figure lying beside the dead Raja

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was nearly as stiff as he. There was no time for anything but furious paddling, with the angry roar of the cheated river in my ears and the fear of death in my heart. But all was forgotten when the dawn broke. The girl began to move. Then she sat up and took a paddle in her hands. We moved swiftly and silently down the river. When we passed the 'Kampang's' where lay the price of good cloth and salt, waiting in vain for me to fetch it, even then my heart was not sore that we had to hurry past. I had only to gaze upon the face of my bride to forget the rattan and the beeswax. We paddled on for two days before we dared to stop.

"At last came the friendly villages, and then the sea. Round the bay I rowed until I reached the Chinese shop. The fat old shopman came down to the beach.

"Where are my rattans and my beeswax?' said he. 'Where is my lovely sarong-cloth and my salt?'

"You must send someone else to fetch them,' I cried. 'I have left them all to save this maiden.'

"Thou art a fool!' he said, very angry. But I was angry, too, and drew my kris and would have killed him, but he ran.

"So I came here, and here I am still," Kadera finished, with a sigh for the good days that had gone, and the bride that had been so beautiful.

Then his wife came in from her fishing. Her body was still beautiful as she stood, dressed in a dripping garment that covered only the lower half of her body. But her eyes were angry and her face was wrinkled with the sun.

CHAPTER XI

BEACHCOMBING ON A SIREN ISLE

I ARRIVED at Soerabaja just in time to see the boat for Bali leave the magnificent wharves of Tandjong Perak. That was that. I had to wait until Sunday afternoon for the next boat of the bi-weekly service. The most annoying part of it all was that the boat remained at anchor in the roadstead outside Soerabaja's beautiful harbour for nearly two hours, waiting for some delayed mails. It was tantalizing.

I spent the afternoon wandering round the busy streets. Soerabaja is a port and a commercial city. The guide books say there is nothing to see there, but I found it interesting, if a little tame. The Dutch have certainly put a rather dull and conventional stamp upon a passive race, and the result is painful. But the whole atmosphere was refreshingly unofficial and informal. The Europeans were there for one purpose—to make money. The main competition is with the climate. Which is why the Chinese—who stand the gruelling better than most nations—are gradually controlling most of the business. There were some very beautiful parks and boulevards. The business quarters, the barracks, arsenals, cinemas, native markets, shops, and the ancient fortress of Prins Hendrick are jumbled together in a labyrinth of alleys and narrow streets. The most interesting part to me was a walk in the residential area. It was the hour between tea-time and dinner. The Dutch ladies—dressed heroically in the latest styles—strolled arm-in-arm with their husbands dressed in their best—pyjamas. It was a strange, yet somewhat pathetic sight. I had my evening

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meal beneath an awning on the pavement in a Dutch restaurant and watched the colourful crowds go by.

The publicity experts in Soerabaja worked overtime on me. Full out with the loud pedal. I fell for an excursion to Pasoerocan and Tosari with a sand sea and a volcano thrown in for full measure. I didn't realize that it meant starting at four o'clock the first morning and three o'clock the next. I didn't realize either that the Dutch always name the minimum schedule for their excursions. To get back in time for my boat on Sunday afternoon I had to perform prodigies of energy that agreed neither with me nor with the terrific heat. When I read the typed instructions at my leisure after the publicity man had finished with me I felt like yelling, "Not on your life!" It was too late then. I had paid out too many badly-needed guilders to draw back.

But when I rode up to the top of the Moengal Pass, after eating a frugal breakfast on horseback, I forgot all my pains. In front of me stretched the great Sand Sea, like a landscape of the moon. Beyond the Sand Sea rose the volcano. The mighty rumbling of Bromo was awe-inspiring, even at that distance. Then came an exhilarating gallop over the sand floor. I hadn't been on a horse for months. I raced ahead of the rest and sang my joy. Soon we stood on the very brink of an active volcano. A sulphurous inferno. The ground shook. It was superbly terrible. Small wonder that this spot had been for untold years an altar of worship and sacrifice to the natives.

My steamer for Bali, a K.P.M. boat, was waiting at the docks when I returned. It was due to sail soon after lunch. I took my meal at one of the restaurants near the harbour, seated under an awning on the pavement. Across the road was a car I recognized from the previous day as belonging to a Dutch business man who had done me some small service. The native chauffeur sat waiting his master's return. As I watched, an American

tourist, complete with a large wife and a blonde daughter hiding her face behind a pair of tinted sun-glasses, went across the road from the steamship office. He approached the Malay chauffeur and evidently demanded to be taken somewhere. The driver naturally protested—in fluent Malay. The tourist insisted—in loud American. The farce went on for a moment or two. I left my lunch and strolled across. The American apparently wanted a car to his hotel. I explained that this was a private car and offered to get him a car from the rank round the corner. I beckoned one of the native taxis from round the corner and the family climbed in. As I started to return to my lunch, the blonde daughter—she was really good-looking behind those glasses—pressed a piece of paper into my hand. I thought: “That’s pretty smart, in front of her family an’ all!” I turned and waved, but they were gone. Then I let out a roar of laughter. The “note” in my hand was for twenty guilders—my first tip! I added a bottle of wine to my Spartan meal, then drank success to all American tourists, a blonde one in particular.

Before the boat sailed I had one last experience that was both amusing and pathetic. The poverty and unemployment in Java was responsible for a great deal of prostitution. In early youth the Javanese boys are exceptionally pretty, while Javanese girls are extremely attractive—for the same short period. A good-looking girl walked beside me most persistently on my way down to the boat. Finding that the most emphatic “No!” failed to shake her determined efforts, I lengthened my stride and left her protesting. No sooner was I congratulating myself on my escape from an embarrassing situation than there was a voice behind me. The same girl, looking, in her colourful sarong, even more bewitching on a bicycle, was pedalling slowly beside me. I had been offered that particular form of solace in every language and from girls of every race, but it was the first time I had been chased on a bicycle for the purpose.

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The idea seemed too comical. I let out a whoop of laughter. It was the most effective method ever invented of disposing of the problem. With flashing eyes and twinkling feet the girl on the bicycle turned and flew.

I was so excited at the prospect of Bali, that it came almost as a physical shock to find that the little packed steamer that sailed for Bali had more than enough room for me. I had expected that a ship for the Garden of Eden I had been promised would be full to capacity. It was only one hundred and forty miles to Bali. We expected to arrive at the port of Boeleleng, Bali's northern harbour, before noon on the following day. There wasn't a deck passage to be had. It was saloon or nothing. But the red plush sofas of the saloon lounge were left to the Malay stewards. Every meal was served on deck. The only other passengers were three Dutch officials, very polite and extremely affable. They started to play bridge at ten o'clock on Monday morning, after playing all the evening and most of the night before, with either the Dutch captain or one of the ship's officers as a fourth, so I might almost have been alone. I made a fourth when neither of these two was available. Fortunately that was seldom. Most of the time I was left in peace. A long wicker chair under an awning, a long drink and a longer siesta gave me a foretaste of the paradise I was approaching.

Soon we were steaming down the Soenda Sea, along the northern coast of the island. For a time the mountainous interior was dark with mysterious, lowering storm-clouds. I stood entranced on the deck. The brown and purple mountains rose in sharp peaks one beyond the other until towering above the rest was one great peak. "The Peak of Bali," said a voice at my elbow. It was the eldest of the bridge-playing Dutchmen. The way in which he said the four words spoke volumes for Bali.

As we watched, the sun burst forth, the dark clouds

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rolled away. The shore and the white houses on the beach stood out in bold relief and vivid colouring. The great foam-crested breakers rolled up endlessly, crashing rhythmically on to the white sands. The steamer anchored in the Boeleleng Roads while a boat came out for me. It pitched and tossed. I jumped in safely, but I must admit to a certain amount of relief when we reached the little wooden pier.

Although I was the only passenger to land, I was not allowed to miss the welcome of Fatimah. And Fatimah is famous. A Balinese "princess," she is reputed to have been saved by the Dutch from being burnt alive at the cremation of her husband, the King of Bali. The truth was, I learnt later, not quite as romantic, but Fatimah was a "character," and, as a Dutchman told me, "not to know Fatimah is not to know Bali." She was a sport, too. When she learnt that my funds would not run to any of the beautiful examples of Balinese arts and crafts that were part of her stock-in-trade, and not even to the hire of one of the fleet of cars she ran, she still insisted that I should have coffee on her veranda. Over a gin-pahit and a coffee—she had the gin and I had the coffee—with a friendly Dutchman as interpreter, we had a most amusing hour. I could not understand her sallies, and the Dutchman did not translate them all, but judging from those he did translate and from his enjoyment of the rest of Fatimah's stories, they were certainly not drawing-room tales. She was very kind to me, gave me good advice, and some very useful introductions.

I learnt, too, that the most interesting part of the island lay to the south of the great mountain wall that ran from east to west, rising sharply from the north coast and sloping gently down to the south. I guessed that the area east of Den Pasar was the place for me. The coast was rugged and wild, with few roads. Here was the unspoilt Bali, living a simple, carefree existence in the huge shadow of the great Peak of Bali. The

ideal spot for a beachcomber in search of romance and colour. Before I left I presented Fatimah with a simple pencil sketch of herself, which pleased her tremendously, and caused her to add a few words to the letter of introduction she had given me. Those few words were to mean a lot to me later.

Thanks to Fatimah I was spared any sense of disillusion that Boecleng might have spelt for me otherwise. For the Bali I saw during the next day was a far cry from the old captain's Bali or the Bali of the steamship posters. I took the road to Den Pasar and the south. It led me first through narrow streets lined with dingy shops, where Chinese in blue pants and forbidding-looking Arabs with black beards sold cheap crockery and coloured cottons. Instead of the beautiful, upright Balinese women, walking with proud grace, a sculptor's model from the waist upwards, there were only uninteresting women in not very clean blouses. Then I came to gasoline stations, neat Dutch bungalows, and a most imposing drive-way flanked with two enormous cement snakes. That was Suigaradja, the official capital. The driveway led to the house of the Resident. Then the road began to climb. The occasional villages were not very exciting, while the temples were very tawdry affairs with tin roofs. I had climbed nearly half-way up the ridge, only stopping to purchase food to eat on the roadside, when a shaft of red light made me turn to face a glorious tropical sunset. A few coconut palms waved, seemingly miles below. The terraced rice-fields climbed nearly to where I stood. Behind me the Peak of Bali lay hidden, but the slopes of the ridge, the miles of waving ferns, the little villages and temples below, were transfigured and glorified by the reflection from the flaming sky above. The Java Sea spread below, while away in the distance a volcano was shadowed against the red ball of the sun as it set. It was almost too dark for me to find a bed when I turned away from

that wonderful sight. The wind was still warm as I curled up in a cosy bed of gathered ferns, in the shelter of a rock. I slept soundly, with the stars above me, although a cool mist on the hills above sent exploring, clammy fingers towards my bed before the morning.

Awake with the sun, I pushed on, eager for the south. A dozen bananas made up my breakfast: my coffee was spring water. The mist was still hanging over the road as I got higher. A few wild-looking men, wrapped in blankets like sad Red Indians, appeared on the road riding on small ponies. Then came a string of pack-ponies tied together. Each wore a square-shaped nosebag of rattan. They munched their breakfast as they ambled down the slope. A chain of musical bells hung round each neck, and one of the drivers sang. It was a pleasant interlude.

Kintamani came into view. A double row of wooden shacks with tin roofs. After that the road ran between high cuttings which shut out the view.

Just beyond the little village of Panalokan there was a sharp bend in the road. A notice, intended for travellers in cars, said "Look out!" If anyone ignored the notice they would certainly miss something. I went to the edge. I was standing on the very lip of an old crater wall which descended steeply for a thousand feet or more. Over on the left was the little village of Batoer nestling beneath the still active craters of twin volcanoes. The plumes of white and brownish-yellow vapours that rose from the two craters was tribute to the courage of the people of Batoer. The slopes were scored with dark brown lava-streams. The last eruption saw the lava-stream within an ace of overwhelming the village. It piled itself high against the temple gates and then stopped. Between the craters lay a great lake—blue and still. To the right were the majestic slopes of Gunong Abang and the wonderful Peak of Bali. The sun lit up the whole landscape, clearing away the last of the mist. I stood silenced.

Descending the ridge, the coconut-palms appeared in dense jungles, overhanging the road like a triumphal archway. At each village my approach was heralded by a host of mangy pariah dogs. A white man on foot was a great rarity. All the villagers came out to see. The houses stood back from the roadway in spacious walled compounds. In each wall was a doorway with a wooden gate. Inside the compounds were pavilions for gods of fierce and terrifying aspect. Every village had its temple, built of a soft sandstone that wears away rapidly. The general effect was that the temples were decaying. That the Balinese are living on the past glories of artists and sculptors long gone, when, in fact, art and sculpture in Bali were very much alive. I soon found out that everyone in Bali, prince or priest, car-driver or coolie, seemed to be an artist. Men and women alike can dance, play musical instruments, paint or carve in wood or stone. No matter how far I wandered off the beaten track it was the same. Some of the most dilapidated villages, even right up in the mountains, had an elaborate temple, with recent carvings of great beauty, an orchestra or a troupe of dancers sometimes famous throughout the island, and whole families of clever painters or actors.

It didn't take me long to come across the main artistic activity of the women. If every village had its temple, nearly every road leading to the temple had its stream of bronze Venuses, bearing wonderful offering to the gods. In very halting Malay, which was not understood nearly as well as my gestures, I asked to see one of the offerings more closely. The smiling owner lifted it from her head to rest it on a low wall. I gazed in amazement. It was a great pyramid of fruits and flowers, a masterpiece of composition in which every colour and texture played its part—and it was nearly six feet high. Another was composed of roasted pig's meat, skewered into a pyramid, seven feet high, the various shapes outlined with the vivid red of chillies.



THE BALINESE ARE A HAPPY RACE

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The lacy stomach tissues of the pig were cut into fantastic but very effective ornamentations.

As I admired these artistic pyramids a crowd of women collected, many carrying similar offerings on their heads, others carrying heavy bundles. The figures and carriage of the women, improved and shewn to advantage by their habit of carrying their goods on their heads, were as nearly perfect as any sculptor could wish. Neither the men or women of Bali wear anything above the waist except on certain ceremonial occasions. The majority of the women still think it brazen and shameless to cover the breasts. Attempts by certain Dutch officials to ordain otherwise have met with little success, and the official Dutch attitude to their colonies is "the minimum of interference with native customs." It is partly a tribute to the success of this method that the Balinese remain such a happy race. They are always courteous but refreshingly proud and dignified, with nothing remotely cringing in their demeanour. That particular group of women regarded me with as much frank curiosity as I did them.

So I came through exquisite woods and palm-groves ; by acres of waterlogged rice-fields ; by mountain slopes and happy valleys and across deep gorges filled with foaming water, to Den Pasar, on the evening of the third day. A golden sunset glorified the landscape as I reached the outskirts. One day was enough. I saw the really wonderful museum in the aloon-aloon (village square). It was built in all the different styles of architecture found in Bali and contained examples of Balinese art and handicrafts.

Then I took the road to the east. I wandered along quite happily for several days between the terraces of rice and by tobacco fields. Each village, hidden behind palm groves, had its own charm. In each I was welcomed first by a pariah chorus and by the scared gruntings of long-headed pigs who seemed to have a

prejudice against white men—a prejudice the people, fortunately, didn't share. From Den Pasar I had brought paper, pencils and crayons. In one village I sat in the evening beneath the shade of an ancient frangipani tree while the whole populace squatted round to watch a picture of the village and the temple come to life on the paper. It was the perfect introduction. For a whole week I stayed there as a guest. Every sketch, almost every line, was the subject of interested comment, which I could not, of course, understand, but which seemed favourable enough when interpreted by signs. Some of the coloured sketches brought forth a delighted "Beh!" of astonishment.

But I, in my turn, had much more to admire. The village temple—the basic pattern varies only slightly from village to village—gave all the "carvers," as they call their sculptors, great scope. The gateways, rather like the two halves of a stylised pine-tree, were beautifully carved. Where there was a doorway the architraves were even more elaborately carved, a great demon-face, the Bhoma, forming the centre-piece. Above was modelled the dancing Shiva in realistic pose. The rest was carved in bas-reliefs, with scenes from local legends or simpler flower or fruit motifs. A screen was placed just beyond the doorway or gateway to prevent the entry of evil spirits. For according to the Balinese the spirits travelled only in a straight line. They were thus easily baulked. That, and the fact that they were easily frightened by noises, accounted for the outstanding feature of the Balinese temple architecture and the most obvious part of their ritual.

The carvings on the screen were mainly low reliefs of terrifying monsters. It was on the temple walls and on the private pavilions for the house-gods in the walled compounds that some of the most interesting figures were carved. There were some delightful pictures in stone of Dutch sailors, with six glasses of beer in front

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of each man and a faithful representation of a long clay pipe. There were motor cars, some being cranked and some broken down. There were cock-fights and dancers, dogs and children; while some of the stone pictures could not have been shown, without giving offence, to any other people but the broad-minded Balinese.

The women, too, brought out for my inspection the beautiful but perishable strips of palm-leaf, about a foot and a half wide and twenty feet long, which they cut into geometrical patterns of great beauty and extremely clever designs. These magnificent ornaments are perhaps the earliest form of Balinese art. Unfortunately, after one day on the altar, or even inside my hut away from the sun, they were hopelessly wilted. The wood-carvers brought out their beautifully polished birds and animals, their intricate carvings of human figures, and their bas-reliefs of legendary stories. They used teak and a beautiful dark red wood I could not recognize, and had wonderful sets of tools with nearly thirty instruments. There was only one painting that I saw. It was a battle scene, a bloody and desperate affair of tangled legs and arms and blood-spattered bodies, with arrows flying in every direction, but it was alive all right.

At last, reluctantly, but fearing to outstay my welcome, I moved on. The road petered out. The beach became the only road, unless I turned myself into a goat. So with the great Peak of Bali on my left, the blue sea on my right, I walked along the level beach past fishing villages and salt-collectors' huts. Bananas and mangoes, with fish from the sea, supplied my simple needs. A fire of driftwood cooked the fish, a green coconut provided a drink that took the place of wine or coffee. It was a care-free existence. The happiest time I have ever spent. My clothes were carried in a bundle, except when the sun was extra hot. Some days I walked ten or fifteen miles along the beach. Often I

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stayed in one spot for days, swimming and idling the time away.

Whenever I felt a desire for company I walked along the beach until I came to a group of outriggers drawn up on the beach. They were queer boats. Shaped like the mythical gadja-mina, half-elephant, half-fish, they were heroically carved with great trunks twisting upwards and with huge elephants' ears. They had eyes to see at night, and a great shark's mouth full of painted teeth stuck out in front. The square-rigged sails were furled above. When I spied a group of these boats I sat patiently down with my sketch-book. Before long a group of naked children would be gathered round in wonder. By the time the sketch was well under way half the village would be grouped around me. With the little clothing I had on, and my complete lack of possessions (I only had a camera, paper and crayons), I was seldom treated with the reserve usually given to white men. A handful of the small copper Chinese coins used as small change, given to the children, was as near as I could get to paying for my board, even after several days. In one fishing village I saw something that I saw at no other village. It had a thatched roof perched up on poles, underneath which were the boilers for the fish. A communal affair which some young Balinese carver had adorned with stone carvings of turtles, shrimps, and all kinds of fish.

I arrived at one little village just in time to see an interesting ceremony. The village gods were being taken down to the sea-shore for "melis"—a symbolical cleansing bath. For that particular ceremony all the women wore white skirts to signify the occasion. As for all their temple ceremonies, they had covered their breasts, draping themselves from the armpits. It was a wonderful sight to see the whole village on the march. The procession moved amidst the palm trees along a path hedged with flaming hibiscus and gay with the

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white frangipani blossom. As it came down towards the beach there appeared bearers of gay flags and pennons, followed by a line of girls in white carrying vessels of holy water on their heads. The little statuettes of the various gods were carried on cushions on the heads of the priestesses, and shaded by three-tiered white umbrellas. Each was decorated with fresh flowers. Women with decorated pyramids of fruit and flowers came behind, followed by a group of fine looking men. The gamelan, or orchestra, with a rhythmic beating of gongs, came last.

Arrived at the beach, the priests prayed, the people sang and danced. I stood at a distance. When the procession returned at dusk I was invited to follow them to the temple courtyard, where the feast continued throughout the night. I sat in a corner of the lamp-lit court. The orchestra played. It was music like tinkling bells with a background of haunting cymbals, punctuated by the sounding of the great gongs. Time was kept by the drummers, who beat impossible rhythms with the tips of their fingers. The music died down to the rippling chords of the smaller gongs, then burst forth again with the original theme. Then the women began to dance. From one end of the courtyard to the other they swayed, stooping with a rhythmic movement to pour holy water on to the ground in front of the gods. As dawn approached the dancing still went on. I sat fascinated. Then the lights were extinguished and the adoration of the rising sun was danced by some of the older women. The party was over. Just as I was thinking of retiring to a bracken bed near the shore, a young man came to me with a message from his father, offering the hospitality of his compound. The essence of the offerings had been accepted by the gods. The remainder had been distributed to the villagers. I breakfasted on baked rice shaped into fantastic ornaments, and slept almost till sundown.

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So delightful were the lotus weeks I spent on that wonderful beach at Bali that I almost despaired of ever tearing myself away. As I happily idled my time away with swimming, only leaving the water when the sun was cool enough to enable me to lie naked on the beach and dream, spending the warm nights on a bed of ferns beneath the simple palm-leaf shelter I had made, I became aware of an excitement and a migratory movement along the beach highway. Gaily dressed groups began to move along the beach, all towards the west. I decided to follow. Back along the way I had come.

Soon we reached the roads again. The groups of pilgrims increased. They turned north towards Bangli and away from Den Pasar. I followed even more eagerly when I learnt the reason. It was a "funeral." Unfortunately, it wasn't the funeral of a raja. That would have been stupendous luck. It was, however, a very important affair, and the deceased was very rich. I knew enough of Bali from Fatimah to realize the good fortune I had. For Balinese cremations are one of the greatest spectacles the East has to offer. When a rich or important man dies, one who can afford the cost of a Balinese cremation, all the lesser dead, who have been waiting for a chance to participate in such an event, are disinterred from the lowly spot where their embalmed bodies have rested. In that way, by following the coffin of the great man, they get the full benefit of the music and the banqueting and ceremony their own relatives could not afford, and yet which is so necessary for their souls' peace—at least in Balinese eyes. Death in Bali, as in China, is an expensive business for the relatives. When a raja or other important man is ill, no cremations take place for weeks and sometimes months, in the hope that the great man's cremation may give the lesser dead their opportunity of fun and fireworks.

For a Balinese funeral is just that—fun and fireworks.

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The fun is almost incredible, for in their cremation ceremonies the Balinese have the greatest fun of even their happy days. It represents the accomplishment of their most sacred duty—the ceremonial burning of the corpse to liberate the soul for reincarnation into higher and better beings. It is the greater tragedy, therefore, when a poorer family have not the money to pay the amazingly high cremation expenses, even if they pawn their growing crops, as they are quite prepared to do. The only solution is to come in at the tail end of a rich man's cremation. Two hundred or more corpses often share the one great show, which may cost anything up to twenty-five thousand dollars. The soul is the main consideration—the body is nothing.

The first procession, a stately, slow and beautiful affair, in which the effigies of the dead were consecrated by the priests, was returning as I arrived. The effigies were borne by beautiful girls in ceremonial dress—gold flowers, yellow sarongs, and lacy openwork scarves over their breasts. The whole village of Bangli swarmed with people. Hundreds slept out—anywhere. At dawn we rose and congregated at the house of the great man. Hordes of half-naked men brought out huge bamboo towers, lavishly decorated and coloured, from one to nine tiers high according to rank and caste. From another corner of the village came the sarcophagi, made in the form of bulls and cows. These queer objects were beautifully carved from wood. Great horns stood out, gilded and painted. The eyes rolled and a red tongue protruded from the painted mouth. Each animal was covered with felt or velvet spotted black, orange or purple to taste. The cows were for the female dead, the bulls for the male. The sexual organs were clearly defined—the bull was even provided with a secret spring to bring his into action. A touch of humour typical of Balinese playfulness.

A hole was cut in the wall of the dead man's house

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and another in the compound wall, to deceive the spirits supposedly waiting at the ordinary gate. Men in loin-cloths appeared carrying the body of the great man and the embalmed, long-dead bodies of his lesser relatives. They were greeted with the first fireworks of the day. But outside the walls waited a tense crowd of other men. The appearance of the bodies, wrapped tightly in white cloth and made stiff with bamboos, was the signal for a most amazing free-for-all. The two sides had a regular scrum amid hooting and yelling, during which the bodies were whirled and twisted and torn: pushed and pulled in every direction. At last the yelling, excited mob reached the towers parked by the roadside. A bamboo runway provided access to the top stage where the bodies were tied, each body miraculously reaching its own tower with the correct number of tiers without falling to pieces.

Then came more cheerful horseplay. The towers in a long line were hoisted on to the backs of men, a swarm to each. Other towers joined in from the rest of the village. The procession could not go straight to the cremating-ground on the outskirts of the village. The evil spirits waiting to capture the souls of the dead had to be still further deceived. Each tower was whirled and twisted about. The whole procession rushed wildly to and fro between the palm trees. A muddy ditch was crossed and recrossed a dozen times, the towers swaying and tossing—the wild-eyed men beneath panting and yelling and roaring with laughter. The maddest and most delightful procession ever. Even the mummified corpses, perched high above the crowd, seemed to share the fun, nodding their heads and kicking their legs amidst the laughter of the onlookers. A circus would not have caused half the amusement. The high priest rode in the midst of the hullabaloo, borne swaying on the shoulders of men, yet somehow preserving an incongruous dignity

which added the last touch necessary to round off the fantastic scene.

The transference of the bodies from the high towers to inside the wooden cows and bulls, which opened on a hinge down the back to receive them, was a signal for a climax of rough play. The bamboo bridges were set up. Small groups rushed along the frail length of the bridge, seized the bodies and rushed them down to the ground before the ever-watchful evil spirits could take any action. Once on the ground the thousands of waiting men took sides. Some were on the side of the dead, "friends of Earth," violently opposed by the "friends of Heaven," who were as determined to get the bodies to the cremation piles to give the soul release as the others were determined to save the body. Between the two sides, fighting over each body as it reached the ground, a series of tremendous battles took place. Clothes were torn off until it seemed as though an army of naked brown men were fighting like gladiators, surrounded by the smoke of the funeral pyres as, one by one, groups of the "friends of Heaven" prevailed and the fires ranged round the field were lit. Over the last bodies there was a great rally. Lost in a sea of brown bodies, the white mummies of the dead could only be seen occasionally as they were tossed about. Wrappings came off. The white bandages tangled round protagonists of both sides. Excited spectators yelled encouragement. The twenty native orchestras pounded away on drum and xylophone, on flute and gong. Before everyone was completely exhausted the "friends of Heaven" came with a final rush. The last splash of holy water fell on the last ill-used corpse. The remaining pyres went up in flames.

I took advantage of the impetus which had carried me to Bangli to walk back over the mountains to Beoleleng. If I had stayed any longer I should never

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have left Bali. Again I stood on the crater edge of Gunung Batoer. On the blue waters of the lake below there were tiny fishing boats. Below me, a nest of toy houses, was the tiny village of Troenjan. On the lava terrace above it stood a solitary temple, a thank-offering for escape from a river of molten lava. The twin volcanoes still poured forth their smoke and steam. I climbed the further side by a zigzag path. I reached the top of the further ridge as evening fell. Only the great Peak of Bali still held the sun. The abyss below me was in darkness, the two cones of Batoer showing in a faint reflected light, like twin Fujiyamas suspended in a misty blue void. I sat silent till the moon came up.

Fortunately for my strength of mind a boat sailed the next day. I looked back from the deck to see the Peak of Bali fading into the distance. I looked forward to the day when I could return. I still look forward.

CHAPTER XII

GYPSY SWEETHEART

I WALKED into the tropical lounge of the "Oriental" Hotel in Bangkok. A very lovely girl was having tea on her own. She seemed strangely familiar, yet I could not remember her face. As I walked in she looked up, caught my eye, and blushed furiously. "Goodness!" I thought, "we have met somewhere and I can't remember where." In view of her obvious recollection of me I could not pass by without saying something. I fell back on the time-honoured "Haven't we met somewhere?" quite expecting to be snubbed. Instead, she laughed and invited me to join her at tea.

"Yes," she replied, "and I owe you an apology."

At that moment her father and mother entered the room—and I remembered! She was the girl in sunglasses who had tipped me twenty guilders in Sourabaja eight weeks before. When we had recovered from our astonishment I introduced myself, and our mutual embarrassment dissolved into laughter. They had come to Bangkok to join a party of friends who were touring the East in a yacht. The daughter was having a trip round the world as a present after graduation from the University of Southern California. Despite our unconventional introduction—or because of it—I was invited to join the party while they were in Bangkok. When her mother added "I shall not believe you have forgiven my daughter, Mr. Shreve, unless you do," and the daughter seconded the invitation with a look that said more, it would have been churlish to refuse. So I was whirled into a week of gaiety in Bangkok that made a wonderful contrast to the previous weeks.

For when I had climbed down to the harbour of Boecleng, sad at the thought of leaving Bali, I had found a boat waiting. It was a rusty, salt-encrusted old tramp, busy taking in a cargo of live cattle and pigs. The animals had been left stranded at Boecleng by an accident to the usual "Pigs' Express"—as the steamer that takes the cattle to Sourabaja is called. There was no accommodation for passengers, so I bearded the captain in his den. After some persuasion and a few gin-pahits he agreed to sign me on as crew, payment nominal unless I proved worth any more. The *Stanley James* was at anchor in the roadstead surrounded by barges filled with Bali cattle, pigs, and bales of fodder. The cattle were walked on board up a steep gangway from the barges. It was exciting work. I was given a stick and sent to the gangway. The natives whacked at the rumps of the wretched beasts and twisted their tails. Two seamen pulled at their heads. Some of them "came quietly." Others were only prevented by brute force from jumping into the sea. That was where I came in. From my strategic position hanging on the side of the gangway I managed to stop some of the more vicious of the tail twisting. Perhaps I only imagined it, but the scared animals seemed to come up more easily without it. The bo'sun evidently thought my job was too easy. He put me on the ropes hauling the cattle in. As each came aboard I had to lead them along the lower decks and tether them in closely packed rows.

Then came the turn of the pigs. I had seen hundreds of the small long-headed Balinese pigs. They swarmed in every village. But I hardly recognized them in their new guise. Each pig was stuffed into his own barrel-shaped crate of rattan. They were easily carried on board, like suitcases, and packed below. That was my job. The crates were stacked into high squares with only a narrow gangway between. The only part over

which the pigs had any control was the use of their vocal organs. The chorus of grunts and squeals in the confined space between decks beggared description. I was assailed on all sides. Even if I shut my eyes and held my ears the smell was terrible. As I could do neither but could only perspire over the unwieldy yelling parcels, I soon felt positively sick. In the tropical heat of that day there was no relief until the ship started. Then I went out on to the open deck, puffed out my lungs and realized that the whole world wasn't poisoned. I was sick and tired of pigs before the eighteen hours' run to Sourabaja was over.

The "Old Man" was in no particular hurry. We paddled along to Batavia, then through the Sundra Strait to Padang, in Sumatra. If I thought that by working my passage I was going to see the world on the cheap I was wrong. The mate and the bo'sun between them kept me busy. When all else failed, they could always find a nice dirty hole for the champion rust-chipper they tried to make me. I saw the ports—the spick-and-span passenger boats, the fussy tugs, dazzling yachts, smart fruit-freighters and sea-stained drabs like ourselves. That, and a few docks and warehouses made up the East Indies for me.

Yet I enjoyed it. She was a happy ship, with a happy crew—except for one good fight. Was that a scrap? We flew the Red Ensign, and the captain and the mate were English. For the rest, there were two Swedes, a Greek, and a dago of some kind who claimed that he was an Italian. He it was who started the trouble. The Greek had an entirely unpronounceable name, but he was a good fellow. Everyone called him Hippy. If anything was wanted—if any particularly difficult piece of work needed doing—if anyone were in trouble—"Where's Happy Hippy?" was the cry. Carlo, the dago Italian, was the only exception. Off watch he spent his time baiting the Greek. One day he knifed

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him over a row about something quite silly. Happy Hippy saw red. He got hold of Carlo, threw him down, got his head between his knees, then before anyone could interfere he grabbed an iron dish from the table and gave his tormentor a battering that was nearly enough to kill him. It made me sick to watch. By the time we pulled him off there was blood all over the place. It stopped that particular trouble though. It also gave me a chance to show that I could do a bit more than cattle nursing or rust-chipping. The mate told me to stand the dago's watch while he lay in his bunk below to recover.

"Ever steered before?" he asked.

"Yes, rather, sir," I said, although I didn't tell him that it was nothing bigger than a baby yacht. Fortunately for me someone or something took his attention for the next few minutes, while the ship veered about like a destroyer chasing a submarine. Up came an amused Hippy.

"Keep her a little to the left of mid-ocean," he grinned, as he watched the tortuous zigzagging of the wake. He stood by until I had got the hang of it. As soon as he had gone the mate came up. For about ten minutes he stood over me, looking rather pointedly at me and then at the wake of the ship. I felt hot and cold round the back of my collar, until, with a grunt, he turned away. After that my days were a bit easier. It was quiet and peaceful on the deck. Even more peaceful was a fine night on look-out duty in the bows, singing out "All's well and the lamps are bright, sir," as the bell was struck every half-hour. I soon learnt to twist a ventilator round to afford both shelter and obscurity for a quiet smoke.

Almost the only time we got ashore was at Nias Island, where we had two days with nothing to do. I splashed a few guilders so that Hippy and I could tour the island in a motor-car. It was a strange ride



GRAT GOLDEN HORNS VILD WITH COLOURD IT ADHERS

through wonderful scenery along incredible roads. There were streams and rivers to cross on frail wooden bridges. It was fortunate for us that we took a circular tour, because half the flimsy bridges seemed to fall down behind us. The technique of our driver was sound so long as it didn't matter about the man who came after. At the sight of one of the crazy bridges he put his foot down hard on the accelerator of our sturdy Ford. Over we went in a flying leap that would have done credit to a circus turn, sometimes leaving only half a bridge behind. Fortunately I had taken my camera. For we ran into a real fantastic dance of the Nias Island warriors. Great golden horns, gold head-bands and jingling golden bangles vied with marvellous feathers to give a vivid splash of colour to the amazingly agile figures. We retired to our chariot with the six-foot warriors brandishing their great spears in still more dances. The rusty sides of our old steamer seemed to belong to another world.

We made our steady way across the stagnant ocean, from Kota Raja across the Straits to Penang and down to Singapore. Then a steady chugging through the South China Sea into the Gulf of Siam, until we came in sight of the glamorous Koh-si-Chang. The dream-like beauty of this temple island in the great Menam river was a wonderful introduction to the strange and romantic land of Siam that lay beyond. From Koh-si-Chang to Bangkok the river lined with houses balanced precariously on two boats, bobbing up and down with every passing launch or motor-boat or waving drunkenly in the wash of every larger ship. There was plenty of room on shore. It was a definite preference that made the Siamese live afloat. Even the more substantial houses were built on piles at the edge of the water. Sampans were the floating shops, and canoes served to take the river-lovers on their visits to their friends in other houseboats, but I saw several

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people, men and women, swimming from one house-boat to another on what might have been a social call.

I left the tramp steamer at Bangkok. There was, I hoped, two months' money waiting for me, if the distant editor had not forgotten me, and some other possibilities, too. I rushed off for my forgotten mail with a hopeful heart, after saying good-bye to my ship and my shipmates with more genuine regret than I could have conceived possible after that first awful day on the "Pig Express." The captain handed over twenty dollars, although he swore, with a twinkle in his eye, that it should have been only two. The mate said it was a pity: in another twenty years he might have made a sailor of me. But even his parting grunt was a friendly one. To crown my pleasure at all this unexpected kindness, my mail contained an encouraging letter from the editor. In another letter I learned that a certain steamship company were not only willing to commission a series of illustrations for a travel folder, but, purely on the strength of the pictures I had sent them, sent me an advance of a hundred dollars, with a promise of more later. I was in clover. So I promised myself a week or two of luxury before I became a vagabond again. That was why, newly shaved and bathed, with new clothes on my back, I walked into the lounge of the Oriental Hotel, into another adventure.

That evening, after a late dinner, I strolled along the terrace above the Menam river. A stringed orchestra was playing an entrancing waltz. Sitting alone beneath the amber glow of a Japanese lantern was my new friend, the "lady of the tip." A few moments later we were gliding over the floor to the stirring music. A pair of roguish eyes looked up into mine. A low, husky voice whispered: "Tell me Galahad, what did you do with that wretched tip I gave you?"

"My dear young lady, I shouldn't dream of telling you."

"Oh, but you must . . . Carl!"

"No . . . Connie."

"Did you throw it into the sea . . . Carl?"

"No."

"Did you tear it up? . . . Were you cross?"

"No. If you must know, I bought a bottle of wine . . . and drank to a certain very lovely but rather impulsive young lady . . . and the final toast was—'Till we meet again!'"

"Oh!" said Connie

We left the dance-floor and went out on to the balcony overlooking the river. The deep blackness of the tropical night was only emphasized by the myriads of twinkling lights along the river banks. They seemed to dance on the water, beckoning. I took the hint.

"What about a gondola, Connie?" I whispered in her ear.

"You do have ideas, Mr. Romeo!" she smiled.

We went down the steps. Our gondola was waiting. It was only a native sampan, but it was long and graceful and the native boy was bright and smiling. We slipped out and away into the velvety darkness—a girl, a boy and a wonderful night in the Venice of the Orient. Along the broad river we passed the white hull of the yacht where she lay at anchor, like a shadowy sea-gull poised for flight, then into the quiet backwaters of the labyrinth of canals that adds so greatly to the charm of Bangkok. At last we returned to the yacht, where the gay lights now danced and a party was in full swing.

Late as we were that night, we had made our plans for the morning. After an early breakfast—with the rest of the party still asleep—we commandeered a sampan and crossed the Menam River to the great-Wat-Poh. It seemed incredible that the busy river highway and the crowded canals were the romantic and amazingly peaceful scenes of our magic journey only the night

before. Just as it seemed incredible that the cool and exquisite girl beside me in her white sports dress was the Connie of last night.

Entering the outer courtyard, we were confronted by the fierce scrutiny of two huge guardian "Yaks," mythical Siamese giants, who leant on stone staves and stared into our very souls. We slipped quickly by, to be rewarded for our temerity by a glorious sight—the lovely "prachedi." The great oblong building had six roofs. The gable ends flamed off into vivid yellow scales. The spire towered upwards. Of the same vivid yellow, it was laced around with green and dark blue tiles in ribbon and flower motifs. Everywhere we looked was the marvellously effective background of vivid colouring, setting off the heavily carved black-wood windows and the lovely gold-lacquered doorways. I had come looking for colour. Here it was in exquisite beauty that defied description. Even the temple walls were symphonies in coloured tiles—a mosaic of rich and scintillating beauty. The gigantic reclining Buddha—seen after considerable difficulty and persuasion—was an anti-climax. The gold leaf was peeling off in leprous patches. However, it could not spoil the effect of that beautiful temple, of those colourful spires and scintillating gables.

Recrossing the river, we took rickshaws to Sampeng Lane, a typical Chinese street. Through this narrow passage flows the bulk of merchandise that is bought and sold throughout Siam. We were almost engulfed by the raucous cries of the food sellers and the wailing of Chinese music. The air was full of warm, curdling smells. Women in bright robes squatted beside their quaint wares. The lisp of bare feet and the clack-clack of wooden sandals echoed in the quieter corners. Chinese silk in gorgeous patterns; batik-work from Java; wood-block prints of native cloths; the famous Niello ware—all these took Connie's attention.

The snake-doctor was attending his patients, the cobbler making shoes; girls made garlands of flowers, and a crowd gathered round the dealer in the famous Siamese fighting-fish. We stopped to watch. The tiny fish, becoming aware of each other, flamed into wonderful colours. Then with swift dashes they flew at each other. Then they waited motionless while a tiny veil, that had been part of the tail of one, settled slowly in the water. Again the quick flash, while the Siamese watched entranced. We came away, relieved to find that the bitten tails grew again when the separated fish were given time to recover. Left together, the fish will fight, tiny flashes of fury, until one or the other falls dead. We visited a "klong" market, where shops and shoppers are all afloat on the canals. We bought some finger-sized bananas, and a green cocoanut for Connie to taste the fluid.

Paddling among the shoppers, we saw many of the picturesque Monks of the Yellow Robe. In their bright yellow garments and their black begging-bowls they were collecting their food before the high noon, after which they can drink but must not eat. From what we saw, none went hungry. So many of the young Siamese men spend their early years in the calling that Siam is sometimes called the "Land of the Yellow Robe." One lovely evening, just before dusk, we strolled into a temple courtyard. Two hundred young priests were saying their evening chant. Kneeling in their yellow robes before a great Buddha, their shaven heads were bent low while they swayed in unison to loud chanting. Candles burning on the altar cast weird shadows on the coloured walls. We crept quietly away from that most impressive service.

Another morning, very early, we rowed across the river to see the Wat Chang—the "clear bright temple." At sunrise its lovely colouring and graceful outline were superb, as seen from the river. A closer inspection

showed that the wonderful colour effects were due to a simple, even crude, method of setting broken crockery and old china in very rough white cement. Yet, as we approached across the river the effect was amazingly beautiful. We saw the same temple from the other, the land side, against a sunset, and again we marvelled.

The opportunities I had of seeing Connie alone were few. At last, in desperation—it was their last night in Bangkok and should have been my last night several days before—I whispered: “Let’s take a sampan to-night, Connie, and lose ourselves in the labyrinth of canals. You’re too far away from me in that crowd of yours. I want you alone for our last night. Will you sing that ‘Gypsy Sweetheart’ song just for me?”

“All right, Carl; so long as you bring me back in time to go with the rest to see the Siamese dancers.”

We stole away. In a quiet waterway we lay in the boat in the darkness. Connie sang the “Gypsy Sweetheart” for me alone. Again she sang—another love song—while we glided slowly along in the tropical starlight. Everything was forgotten in the wonder of the night and the wonder of the girl beside me. I turned to murmur words of love, words that might have changed my plans, have changed my life. At that moment from the star-lit water came the splash of oars and a burst of laughter.

“There they are: Come on, Carl—come on, Connie. We are going.”

It was the crowd. Our moment had gone. We were swept up in a tide of excitement to the native café to see the Siamese dancers. Part of me cursed that fatal interruption. The other part—only a small part just then—rejoiced. The lure of romantic lands still unseen, of “traveller’s joy” still unabated, beckoned me on again—but it was with an ill grace that I rejoined the party.

For the last part of our water journey we were guided

by the weird barbaric pulsating of native xylophones, gongs, and water-drums. As we climbed the steps and opened the café door, it was a queer blend of American jazz that met us. A cabaret turn had just finished, and the floor was free for dancing. Around the floor were grouped a number of small tables. A few white men and still fewer white women were there. Most of the white men were dancing with good-looking native girls, who acted as hostesses, being hired as partners for each dance or for the evening, but a few danced with their own partners or wives. Connie was whisked away from me and into the dance by one of the crowd.

In between each dance came Siamese dances—twenty or thirty girls in gold head-dresses and colourful costumes—to dance the graceful and fantastic dances of Siam. After them came the star turn of the evening. The music rose to a rhythmic throbbing that beat on the senses and swelled to a climax. Then it sank to a low tense throbbing. *Through the doorway flashed a dancer.* Her limbs and breasts were sheathed in shining gold, her face and hands were white. She darted into the centre of the stage with the poised glittering swiftness of a dragon-fly. For a moment, while the music sank to a whisper, she postured with iridescent quivering flanks, then spun swiftly on naked feet that twinkled and flashed while the music rose and rose to crashing heights of sound. Her dance was a thing of thunder and flame, suddenly twisting into a mad whirl of burning desire. The music boomed and throbbed to a higher pitch. Other dancers flashed upon the stage. Grotesque masks glittered above shimmering costumes; light flashed on breasts and limbs, and trained muscles drew the delicate limbs into incredible postures. Then a final whirl of masks and white faces and spinning toes, rising to a fantastic climax. The music came to a quivering stop. The stage was empty.

We walked back to the hotel through the deserted

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streets—all together. It was our last night. Connie and I made one more attempt to recapture the lovely spirit of that moment on the water, but the cheerful inanities of the rest defeated us.

We shook hands in front of the whole crowd next morning. If there was a tear in the corner of her eye and a lump in my throat, no one else noticed it. We never met again. If she ever reads this, although her name wasn't really Connie, she will know that I have not forgotten her, and that even a gramophone record of "Gypsy Sweetheart" still recalls the magic of that wonderful week.

CHAPTER XIII

THE WONDER OF WONDERS

SUNRISE broke over the immense rice-paddys that stretched as far as eye could see. Native drivers called to lumbering water-buffaloes pulling ploughs that were little more than bent sticks. To all appearances they were ploughing the waves as they scratched laboriously at the rich soil underneath the muddy floods. Workers in large sun-hats were bent over tiny rice plants, while in other fields the ripe grain was being gathered in.

Soon the rice-paddys gave way to jungle that enclosed the railway line on both sides. The border town of Aranya-Pradesa marked the end of the railway. A large 'bus from Siemreap met the train, but it was only after a little difficulty with a French immigration officer that I climbed aboard for Indo-China and mighty Angkor. Natives from the surrounding jungle and villages soon filled the rest of the 'bus. We speeded away over an uneven road, swerving wildly round corners, the native driver blissfully ignoring the remote possibility of other traffic.

The almost naked people of the jungle villages made a strange contrast to the modern 'bus. As we approached each group of pile-raised houses of bamboo and thatch, the 'bus slowed down. Native shoppers, with queer-shaped baskets, dropped off with all the facility of born straphangers, and disappeared into the jungle. Twilight swiftly faded into darkness. Still we tore along, a beam of light showing up the dense undergrowth on each side. Shrill cries came out of the

darkness—small animals crossed the road in a scared rush—sometimes small groups of jungle-dwellers showed for a moment, gathered round their fires, as we rushed on. There was only one cross-road on the whole one hundred and fifty-nine kilometres between the Siamese border and Siemreap, and only the small Chinese town of Sisaphon provided an excuse for more than a short halt.

A three-quarter moon rose above the river as we slowed down at our destination, the Cambodian village of Siemreap. Angkor Wat, the "wonder of wonders," lay only six kilometres away. Before I settled down for the night I strolled along the river bank and over a little camel-back bridge. The path was lined with banana trees. Fast-moving clouds, silver in the moonlight, scudded across the tropical sky and were reflected in the quiet water. On an upturned boat, beached by the bridge, a Chinese boy played a sentimental ballad to the girl beside him, on a wailing, high-toned clarinet, the moonlight weaving a shadowy pattern of foliage around them. It was a wonderful night.

If dawn over the paddy-fields of Bangkok had been lovely, dawn over Angkor Wat, the most colossal and perfect monument ever built by man, promised to be much more wonderful, as I waited, looking across the huge moat, six hundred feet wide, for my first glimpse of the jungle-girt temple of the ancient Khymers. The "hunter of the east" sent forth his first rays, making the dark waters visible. A great cloud appeared in the sky. Yet, even as I watched, the cloud unfolded into blossoming towers. It was Angkor Wat, the incomparable. A miracle in stone.

The huge causeway appeared, unrolling magnificently across the dark moat and plunging through the great outer portico walls. The deep chariot ruts showed in the flagstone flooring as the darkness disappeared, and the temple became a living thing. The high towers were bathed in a flood of gold, although the ghosts

of the night still haunted the vast and empty corridors. The sun rose higher over Angkor Wat. Tier on tier of magic stone rose from the very edge of the all-consuming jungle, an amazing spectacle. All the superlatives used by travellers who had seen that magnificent sight faded away, pitiful in their inadequacy. It was beautiful and powerful beyond imagination, but desolate. How desolate I only realized as the tiny figure of an old man, wearing a bright sarong, started to cross the causeway to where I stood entranced.

I walked to meet him.

"All the mysteries of earth and sky are revealed to those who have the key," was his greeting.

I gratefully accepted his offer to guide me round the temple. Together we crossed the sacred moat where the water-lilies grew in lonely splendour. We came to the outer wall, guarded by Magas, great seven-headed cobras, whose stone bodies stretched back along the causeway on either side, serving as a railing. By the entrance were steps leading upwards—steps so smooth that we had to mount them sideways. A stone terrace lay in front of us, facing the moat. Inside the walls was a roofed-over chamber upholding the melancholy beauty of a ruined tower gate. Porticos led out to arched entrances which were used by elephants and chariots in the days of Angkor's arrogance. On either side long colonnaded galleries seemed to go on endlessly into gloom. The air was filled with the sharp musty smell of the bats that stirred in the dark corners overhead. We were marching along the mighty stone causeway that led us on and up to the great terraces and temples above. A cluster of palm trees gracefully filled a corner of the vast courtyard. Beneath them were the palm-thatched houses of the "bonzes." A group of these young priests in their flowing yellow robes were starting out to beg their morning rice, carrying their black begging bowls in their hands.

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Approaching closer to the real temple, it became possible to obtain a clearer idea of the colossal tribute in stone. The main structure was a symmetrical pyramid, rising in four mammoth tiers to a central cone enclosed by three galleries complete with windows and roofs. The lower gallery, which we were approaching, was without towers and was more than half a mile round. The second gallery was smaller, but had a tower at each corner. The third gallery, the highest, was helmeted by four immense towers straining upwards to the central cone. Every wall was covered with carving. Miles of bas-reliefs told the story of the ancient Khymers, of their work, their play, their loves and hates, and of the gods who guided them. It was a stupendous pageant—too immense to be comprehended immediately.

If a symphony can be conceived in stone, the ancient builders created delicious music on the walls of Angkor Wat, beginning from the entrance chamber in swelling rhythm to the southward. There was the crash of steel on steel; of huge chariots locking their wheels in conflict; of great war-elephants trumpeting defiance over an almost obscene mass of the arms and legs of vanquished warriors. There were warriors in strange armour, armed with swords and spears or bows and arrows—some in chariots, some astride horses, some riding scaly lion-like beasts. With them went armoured monkeys.

There were the armies of gods and men, Vishnu in two incarnations—once as a boar, again as another creature, half-animal, half-man. Demons fought with angels. Panoplied kings in howdahs on elephants led their armies. Mythology and history were poured into one amazing mould. The battles of the Ramayana intermingled with the conflicts of the Khymers. At each corner the bas-reliefs stopped. They were renewed beyond a small roofed chamber, decorated from floor

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to ceiling with exquisite lacy carvings. The chambers were like intermezzos between the acts of an opera. I was glad to pause in them, almost breathless from the impact of the violent scenes all round. Then, refreshed, I emerged into the next gallery. The fierce sunshine pouring in between the pillars of a double colonnade was dimmed to an unreal quality that made the whole scene look like an incredibly beautiful stage setting—a twilight of the gods.

In the Southern gallery a frieze of winged gods sitting in a shrine traced itself delicately over green-streaked stone. Touches of gold leaf, centuries old, gave a hint of the ornate splendour that once was vivid and alive. Hundreds of sacred dancers, some dressed as birds, lined the walls. A god with twenty-four arms stood out in terrible relief. Beyond another roofed chamber the theme changed. I watched the stone story of the churning of the sea of milk. The Asuras and the Devas, gripping the body of a giant sea-serpent, were engaged in a turbulent tug-of-war in a sea filled with monstrous marine animals. Vishnu danced on the turtle which defined the centre of all balance. The gods out-numbered the demons. They were winning the battle, but what a fight it was !

We reached the north gallery. Again a new note . . . the jarring clash of cymbals ; for here began a huge double frieze picturing Paradise and Purgatory. The pleasures of Paradise were few. Only the imaginative could see the real rewards of virtue. The main delight apparently lay in riding on a palanquin and being gently fanned by voluptuous dancers, the consorts of the gods. Hell was quite a different story. The artists had really let themselves go. Its grosser terrors were shown in meticulous and horrid detail that left little to the imagination. Dead bodies were held aloft and hurled through the air. Others were being trampled cruelly under armed heels. There were

figures being torn to pieces. I saw portrayed the thirty-two hells of Brahminism—the hell of sharp-thorned trees, the hell of fire-mountains, the hell of choking, and all the rest—a veritable vale of tears. In the midst of this agony, sitting astride a water-buffalo, was the god Yoma—Judge of the dead.

Next came the muffled basso of the kettledrums. I seemed to hear the staccato clash of arms. Before me a vast stone army was on the move. It was the great migration of the Khymers. There was the throb of marching troops. Then the tempo quickened, mounting wildly. The battle-screams of elephants, the screech of chariot-wheels, the crash of steel on steel, led up to a tremendous scene of madly whirling arms and legs, where muscle-straining men tore at armed foes in a fighting uproar that only rose to a climax as the prodigious bas-relief came to a thundering end. I was so completely exhausted that I sat down on the edge of the wide terrace that extended right round that sensational gallery. The palm trees that grew beside the graved stone seemed poised as though they too wished to join in that fierce conflict. I looked across at the waving jungle-tops—another invading army ready to march on to Angkor Wat. It stretched onwards right across to distant China, a sea of vivid greens. For hundreds of years it had hidden the stupendous wonders of Angkor in its dark and steaming depths. The slightest relaxation on the part of the defenders would find the green army fighting its way back again. The preservation of Angkor Wat after its belated discovery, following centuries of oblivion, was a constant struggle.

The little copper-coloured man in the bright sarong who was my guide, showed a capacity for self-effacement that was incredible in one of his profession. He led me on from gallery to gallery in the correct order that took me through the history of the amazing people

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who had built this colossal prayer in stone. Yet when I stopped he just waited. I often forgot he was there. But a quiet pluck at my sleeve would sometimes call my attention to something I might have missed.

Together we entered another gallery that seemed to extend into space. The great length gave it a tunnel-like aspect despite the remarkably high ceiling. A great golden Buddha was sitting on the third coil of Nagga, the red and black, seven-headed cobra. The huge hooded head coming up behind the Buddha made an arch-shaped canopy over the silent brooding god. Each of the four interior corner towers were guarded by similar figures. *The only sign of life among all those ancient dead was the fluttering of the bats which lived in their hundreds in the forgotten towers and along the great galleries. Where they lived and powdered dead stone with their droppings, twenty thousand temple slaves had once made their homes and lived their lives. In the four large pools, now empty, ancient priests had bathed before entering the more sacred parts of the temple. The delicate stone spooling of the high windows let in shafts of light that shone on to the gossamer threads of the spiders' webs that were spun between the countless Buddhas. Light shone, too, on to the vivid yellow robes of priests, the first sign of life we had seen since we had watched the young priests departing with their begging bowls a whole morning before.*

Out again into the sunlight I stared across a great stone-floored courtyard at the third and last of the terraced galleries, from which rose the five great central towers, still over two hundred feet above the height on which we stood. In the courtyard were scattered enormous masses of stone which had fallen from the towering heights above. Three immense stairways led upwards on all four sides to the last colonnaded gallery. The stairways were grey, worn and slippery, making it

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necessary in places to go on hands and knees. We went on from chamber to chamber.

Carved in groups of threes were the Apsarases, slim figures with exquisitely chiselled features, clothed only in girdles and necklaces and wearing three-cone tiaras like the towers of the Wat. These were the dancers and the consorts of the gods. Once an Apsaras fell in love with a human. Their daughter grew up, lovely and graceful as the wind. One day she danced before the gods and won such favour that she was given into the hands of the high priest. Ever after, Tevadas, as these earthly reproductions of the Apsarases are known, had been attached to the various Brahmin temples. Their memory is treasured in the almond-eyed stone figures that danced before me, their faces and breasts rubbed smooth by the hands of the devout. They were everywhere, but in chamber after chamber the delicate limbs were green with mould, the same green mould that covered the terraces, lined the empty pools, and crawled like a plague across ancient beauty.

At last I gazed upon the central tower. It ascended in diminishing ridges to the apse, where, at the height of Angkor's glory, a golden lotus curled. Under the tower was the Penetralis, the Holy Chamber. Only the highest priest could enter without penalty of death. Legend says that it once contained the famous emerald Buddha. To-day it is an echoing emptiness.

It was late in the afternoon before I thought of eating. The old guide sat with me on the edge of a terrace and shared my lunch. Then, with all of Angkor Wat stretched out below as witness to his incredible story, he told me of the ancient empire of the Khymers. How the Brahmin Kings came down from India two hundred years before Christ and waged war on the peaceful Cambodians. How the mighty army swept across Burma and Siam to victory. In the thousand years that followed came a line of kings and battles

whose names are now barbaric music. In that time the great city of Angkor rose. Yaco-Varman built the magnificent palace of Angkor Thom, now almost swallowed by the jungle. Here King Swiya-Varman II started work on the mighty Angkor Wat—greatest of the Angkor temples. It was almost impossible to believe that at one time the Angkor Wat, stretched below, was only one of a dozen mighty palaces and temples. It was the greatest and is the best preserved of all those colossal sandstone structures—yet it was only a part of a vanished city that housed millions of people, and which was the luxurious centre of a mighty empire.

The old man—I had christened him Doc, after unavailing attempts at pronouncing his real name—looked down reflectively at the green stains on the stones below, refilled his pipe, and continued to tell of King Swiya-Varman II. Of his dream of a mighty sandstone temple that would outshine all the temples of Java for carvings and the temples of India for size—a monument to his own glory. My guide pointed to the East whence came the immense blocks of stone, and I could see it all so clearly. The chariot road that became a pageant of naked brown men marching up and toiling down with coral-red stones on rollers, so close together that it must have seemed as though the very road was moving on towards Angkor; the straining muscles of men and elephants, lashed with whips and pricked by goads, that kept the tide of stone flowing from out of the hills; the primitive derricks that swung great blocks, so perfectly fitted and ground together that the lack of cement was not noticeable in the finished work. My imagination filled in the years as the Cambodian sun poured down—the rains came—and still the jungle road echoed to the sound of rollers and the cries of men. I saw the chisellers at work and the workers in gold leaf. The great towers rose. A hundred thousand

human bees swarmed over the great stone pyramid. When all was finished and Angkor was at the very height of its glory, a Chinese scholar travelled through the Eastern countries and came to Angkor as the Ambassador of his King. What he wrote became history, the rest remains legend and mystery. Those upright supports along the great causeway, I was looking down on the lovely bridge across the moat far below, were warriors, resting on their knees, holding the body of the giant Naga, the seven-headed cobra, in their arms. Some of them had grown tired of their task and had slipped off into the moat.

So it may have been when the terrible Siamese army beat the Khymer in battle and swept on to Angkor. The King was roused in his golden towers; fires were lit in the streets; all available men were armed and sent forth—but in vain. Great armoured elephants lunged against the outer gates; war-chariots trampled the wounded and dying; the captive slaves within the gates rose in rebellion against masters who had grown fat and indolent; through the gates and over the walls swept the invaders. The Khymer drums were silenced; the people ran wildly. . . . Angkor was lost for ever.

"But why did no one stay—why didn't the vanquished return?" I asked.

"That, my son, is what we would all like to know, and that is what we shall probably never know. There was silence in Angkor for eight hundred years, until a French scientist named Mauhet cut a path to it through the jungle."

I was quite startled when Doc finished his story, so vividly had the pageant passed before me. Now the corridors behind us were dim, the empty pools below were pools of darkness. I gazed down in awe from the dizzy height as the shadows crept nearer. It was nearly sundown. The distant galleries were outlined against a sky of red and gold. We walked quickly

back, emerging on to star-lit terraces and feeling a difficult way down ancient slippery stairways. A torch borrowed from a group of young priests returning to their rest saved us from some nasty stumbles. Bats and lizards were in possession of the galleries again, and were violently disturbed by our progress. Dancing girls on their columns seemed to move and smile as we passed. The sense of desolation and utter loneliness affected me so powerfully that I was glad to reach the great stone causeway again.

* * * * *

The next day I went by a jungle trail to see the Temple of Bayan. The jungle had won this time. The fifty towers were crumbling or lay in ruins. With considerable originality and extraordinary realism the top of each tower had been carved with the four faces of Siva, each eight feet high. Many of the faces lay in pieces where the towers had fallen. Others were left still upright to stare out on to the encroaching jungle with eyes as passive and as remote as the Sphinx. The octopus-like roots of the wild fig-tree entwined themselves between the cracks and joints, forcing them apart. Mosses and green mould made some of the faces leprous and revolting. Smaller patches of mould sometimes blinded an eye or imparted a knowing leer. The effect of the dark green jungle, the twisting choking roots and creepers, with those amazing faces staring from every dark corner, was unbelievably awe-inspiring. I stumbled across elephant friezes and crumbling gateways, while all the time those faces peered at me from the tree-tops and from the ground. They seemed to search my soul. No matter where I looked or where I trod they pursued me with a dumb persistency like a dead hand clutching. There was a chill in the dank mossy odour of decay, even in the heat. The monstrous wild-fig roots, pale in that green twilight, are said

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to be inhabited by the spirits of vanquished Khymer warriors.

On my way back I followed a deep cut trail that was once a chariot road. Monkeys in hundreds swung through the trees, their chattering and screaming drowning the shrill cries of unmusical birds. I stopped to watch a "safari" of immense black ants. They moved in a solid stream six inches wide, reddish-coloured warrior ants guarding the flanks. I watched them dispose of a dead lizard a hundred times their size—and felt sorry for any wounded animal or helpless human being that lay in their path.

An unexpected curve in the trail made me rather conscious of the fact that I was lost, until suddenly a swinging foot-bridge, made of bamboos and twisted vines, led me over a small river and into the centre of a native thatched pile village. Drowsy in the afternoon sun, the village seemed deserted, until a crowd of pot-bellied kids appeared from nowhere to see and if possible to touch the strange white man. Then the women and girls left their domestic duties and crowded round. Most of the men appeared to be away. I sat native fashion on the split bamboo floor of a hut to which I was invited, and drank a "tea" of infused herbs. A mother brought a yelling infant up the steps to see me. He shut up like a clam. Perhaps she had told him that the "bad white man" would come after him, as some of us tell kiddies that the "black man" will get them if they don't keep quiet. An urchin of a guide led me through towering bamboo plantations, crowned with high and rustling plumes, back to the main road leading on to Angkor Wat and back to the simple bungalow where I was staying.

For several days I explored Angkor Thom and Angkor Wat. I sketched and drew, and tore up sketches and drawings, disgusted at their inadequacy. Even in the vast spaces of Angkor Wat I was seldom without an

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audience. On one occasion two hundred yellow-robed priests craned their necks in turn for a glimpse. I persevered until I had sketches that I could take away with some satisfaction. Day after day I climbed about those fabulous ruins, storing up memories—memories of sunrise and sunset, of moonlight and stars, of sunshine and waving trees, of desolation and incredible loneliness. Always, as the shadows crept forth, the ghosts of the past walked again and peopled that vast tomb of a mighty race with strange figures and stranger fancies. Until the last night, when I stood—the only living thing—in the moonlight, and said farewell to the wonder of wonders—Angkor Wat.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CANNONS ROAR

“**A**RE you interested in guns?” said a voice over my shoulder.

I jumped. I was back in the hotel at Siemreap to finish off some of my sketches, and I had gone to the manager’s office to make an inquiry. The room was empty, and while waiting for the manager’s return I had become engrossed in an examination of a very fine collection of wicked-looking guns. The manager, Mr. Andrew Vergoz, smiled as I rather guiltily replaced in its rack the weapon I had been examining.

“Why, yes,” I replied. “Tell me, who owns all these cannon?”

“They’re mine,” he said, and smiled at hearing his prize shooting-irons called cannon.

“And the zoo trophies—are those yours too?” I asked, pointing to the display of very fine heads that adorned the walls.

“Yes, those are mine, too.”

I could only gaze with a naive sort of wonder at the man who treated so lightly a collection of heads that would have been the envy of many quite famous big-game hunters. There were tigers, leopards, wild elephants and, most difficult and dangerous of all trophies to acquire, many fine heads of sladang, the terrifying water-buffaloes of Indo-China. Many experienced big-game men are quite prepared to give the sladang a clear path, yet on the walls before me were nearly a dozen huge heads.

My very real enthusiasm was apparently convincing

enough. We sat up late that night in the manager's room talking. At least, I listened and Mr Vergoz talked. At about two a.m., when we decided that we really ought to go to bed, Vergoz took my arm as we walked through the deserted dining-room.

"I'm off for a week or two to-morrow," he said casually as he examined the shutters and switched out the lights behind us. "Like to come? I can lend you guns and fix you up with some more suitable clothes."

Would I . . . ! My heart skipped a beat or two . . . Would I not ! When I tried to thank him he waved me up to bed. "Anyone who loves guns is a friend of mine. Sleep well, and don't be late in the morning."

I wasn't late in the morning, but I hardly slept for excitement. By six o'clock we were on our way in a car to the village of Spean-Ta-Ong. There the road petered out after about twenty kilometres. We left the car and arranged for six bearers to carry the tent and other equipment. Unlike the African bearers, these men do not handle the guns, but attend to all the baggage. They do help in tracking and locating the game, however, and very good they are.

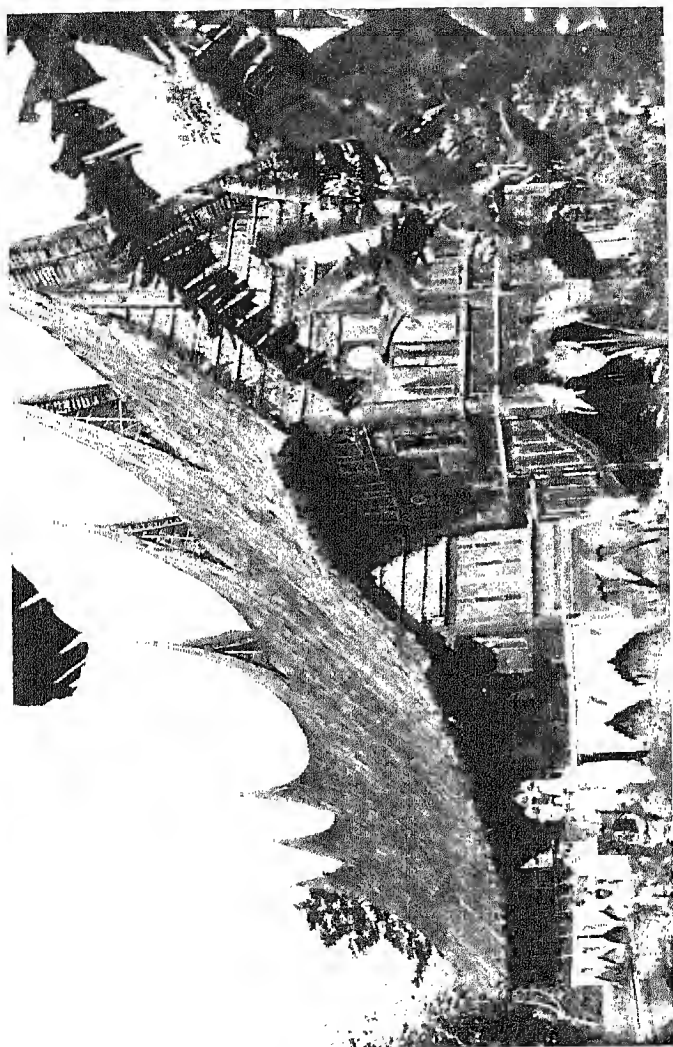
According to Andrew—we dropped the "misters" after about ten minutes of our talk the night before—we had another twenty kilometres to go to get to the real game country. It was twenty kilometres of water covered waste land, too. We put on high rubber waders and plunged in. Wild rice grew luxuriantly with wonderful colouring varying from emerald green to coral red. Whether it was as an antidote to the excitement I felt or to alleviate my consciousness of the fact that poisonous snakes were plentiful, I don't know, but I could not get rid of a stupid jingle that kept running through my head. "And the wild rice grew all round, my boys, and the wild rice grew all

round." It was quite absurd, but I splashed along in a friendly silence beside Andrew for miles before I got that tune out of my head.

Sometimes we passed a stretch of land that was partly cultivated. The domestic water buffaloes, each with an attendant "paddy-bird" or "buffalo-cleaner" sitting on their backs, were being guarded and bullied by round-bellied, diminutive urchins. They made a striking contrast to their bellicose buffalo cousins, the vicious and cunning sladang we had come to hunt. The "paddy-birds" were about the size of a crow and as white as that bird is black. In exchange for board and lodging they kept the animals' backs free of ticks and mosquitoes.

The first night we built temporary sleeping quarters in a bamboo thicket, and managed to keep fairly dry above the knee-deep water. At times, on the march, the water was up to our arm-pits. We held our guns above our heads. I was keeping a sharp look-out for snakes; cobras, and deadly ringed kraits were very plentiful, but Andrew told me that the snakes slept for most of the day. Which was a comforting thought in that infested area.

At last we came to the real sladang country and the ridge where we pitched our base camp. It was one of the best game sections in Indo-China. Bamboo clumps and patches of low thorn trees alternated with the great ant-hills that dotted the country-side. It was a section well suited to the habits of the species of wild water-buffalo we were after. Caution became imperative. The sladang is one of the most dangerous and ferocious animals in existence. With an acutely developed sense of sight and smell he combines a cunning that frequently turns the hunter into the hunted. If they become conscious of being followed they double round in a circle in an attempt to charge the hunter from the rear. It's a case of quick, straight shooting or of being gored



EVEN THE HOUSES HAD "BUFFALO" ROOFS

or trampled to death. Great sweeping horns and powerful muscles make them formidable opponents. Each thicket and each clump of watergrass or bamboo could hide several animals. At Andrew's suggestion, we spread out a little, advancing about two hundred feet apart.

Andrew was carrying a double-barrelled Express Special with a stopping power of several tons. The terrific impact was capable of bringing an elephant down. I had one of his ten-seventy-five Mausers, a five-shot and a lighter gun. A high ridge loomed in front like a sea of green. The bearers had dropped back. I kept Andrew well in sight. I didn't want to be too far from my only source of help if a charge came my way. A few small barking deer were sighted, but nothing else. We crashed further into the ridge, a stretch of high ground three or four miles wide and a hundred miles long, and made our camp for the night in the green twilight of its thick growth. The rain came early in the night and lulled us to sleep with its drumming on the tent roof, despite the weird calls of animals that seemed to be holding a council of war round the camp.

Leaving camp at dawn, with four boys as trackers, we worked our way along the edge of the ridge where the tangle was not so dense. Rainy mornings were best for this kind of hunting. Almost at once we found fresh indications of *sladangs*. I could feel my heart thumping with excitement. Not five minutes later one of the trackers, working ahead on Andrew's left through tall elephant grass, screamed for help. I had just a glimpse of him running back. Then came two shots in quick succession. A bull *sladang* had sighted the native and charged. Andrew had obtained a glimpse, just sufficient to take quick aim. The beast stumbled and sank into the marshy ground. Very alertly I waited to see if any other members of the herd

would charge. I could hear them crashing through the dense jungle. After a few seconds that seemed like years there was silence again. I started to move cautiously towards the shot bull. Andrew signed to me to wait. At that moment there was a slight movement in a clump of tall grass on my right. A great head with sweeping horns went down. It was my turn to be charged. Up went my gun. I fired at the small portion of shoulder which was exposed. The beast stumbled, but before he could fall a shot from Andrew's heavy gun went ploughing through the head.

Placing three of the boys on the watch, we went cautiously forward, guns reloaded and ready. The first bull was lying stone dead with a hole in the neck and one just above the shoulder.

"Gee! Andrew, you made a real heart shot on that fellow."

"Yes, that's the vulnerable spot all right. Never forget that these sladang are highly dangerous, even if they do look as peaceful as this one."

He certainly did look peaceful—just a great plodding water-buffalo, as he lay there. We walked across to the other one, keeping Andrew's warning well in mind. That one, too, was dead, but after my memory of the swift movement of his sudden charge I appreciated Andrew's extremely cautious approach.

"Yes, he's yours all right," said Andrew, after examining the effects of our shots; "my shot was a precaution, and you can't be too careful; but your bullet had stopped him, sure enough."

The old bull had a splendid head and many scars from years of dominating and ruling the herd. He was probably their outside guard that morning, and I felt quite sorry for the old fellow coming to a sudden end after his days of ruling glory. Yet many hunters have tried for years to obtain such a trophy, and I was very thrilled and elated as we went after the rest of the herd.

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Before the end of that day I realized more fully how fortunate I had been. It was a game of phantom hide-and-seek. All day we tracked those sladang through the rain. Sometimes the sun broke through and nearly blinded us as we emerged from the soft grey light of the denser thickets into the open spaces. Sometimes we heard the animals crashing through the jungle, and stood like statues, with every nerve tingling. We had no further glimpse of them all day. Tired, wet, but happy, we returned to camp and a good meal. Several days of hunting produced no further result, but I shall never forget the tense excitement of those days. There was always the feeling that a great bull sladang was waiting quietly and cunningly in a clump of grass or a thicket until we passed. There were plenty of fresh signs everywhere; there seemed to be sladang uncomfortably and dangerously close all round us—yet not another one did we see.

“What about a shot at tiger, Carl?” said Andrew. “We don’t seem to be getting very far with the sladang.”

“That suits me,” I replied. “What do we do? Hide in a tree-platform all night?”

“No, that’s the Indian method. Here in the ridge we hunt by day. Our tigers are smaller than the Indian tigers, but they are just as ferocious. We will leave at dawn for the higher ground. There’ll be no water to plough through, which will be a change at least.”

We left camp at dawn for the higher ground. Rain had fallen in the night. The dense foliage was dripping wet and steaming hot, so that I was soon as wet as if we had been ploughing through the lowland marshes. We were travelling in game trails that resembled a network of tunnels. Great banyan trees covering an acre or so of ground in a huge cathedral of rooted branches punctuated the trails like stations on a subway. Monkeys overhead shouted and scolded at us, spoiling our chance of seeing any game, although we could hear

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it everywhere. From one of the hundreds of rooted boughs of banyan I saw a green rope hanging. It moved. My shot aroused the jungle, but the great snake slithered away unhurt.

Late in the afternoon, just as we were thinking of making camp, there was a faint movement two hundred feet ahead along the trail we were following with bent backs. It was my turn to jump this time—as Andrew's gun went off with an explosion that nearly deafened me. There was a leopard crouching by the side of the trail. It was hit, but not fatally, for, with a tremendous spring, it took refuge in a nearby bamboo thicket. That was not so good. A wounded leopard means some very dangerous work. We stopped to cut very long bamboo poles. While the boys prodded gingerly into the undergrowth, Andrew and I stood ready beside them. Out came the leopard, a snarling, snapping fury. We fired simultaneously. The heavy slugs tore through him and bowled him over and over. The bearers soon had him strapped up to a bamboo pole and we headed back to camp: a leopard, but no tiger. Several times on the way back we saw fresh tiger signs and looked forward to the next day's hunting. I didn't waste, on the ruthless killer slung beneath the bamboo pole, any of the sympathy I had felt for the sladang bull.

At daybreak we were off again. We sighted two cheetahs, but with tremendous bounds they were away into the jungle before we could do anything about it. We followed the fresh spoor of a tiger for hours. When at last we came in sight I fired from sheer excitement. It was an impossible shot, and I missed. I threw a glance of mute apology to Andrew. Good sportsman that he was, he only said, "Better luck next time!" which was real self-control in the circumstances.

In the afternoon we glimpsed another cheetah out on the limb of a banyan tree and silhouetted against the sky. Again Andrew proved himself a grand sports-

man. "Here's your big chance, Carl," he said. It was something my size all right. Something I could see—a perfect target. Underneath the tree the ground was clear. Quite indefensibly I saw a chance to make grand-stand play that was too good to miss. Fortunately I "got away with it." A real movie turn it was, too. I wanted to shoot the limb of the tree off first and then shoot the cheetah in mid-air. I fired—the branch broke. Down came the cheetah in a tumble. I shot again while he was in the air. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Andrew raise his gun. It wasn't necessary. A few reverberating growls and the cheetah lay still. We gathered round. It was the first wild cheetah I had seen at close quarters. The bearers strapped him on a pole; another killer checked off. . . .

One of the trackers waiting for us at the camp rushed up as we arrived.

"I have found a herd of fifty wild elephants!" he shouted.

"Where?" exclaimed Andrew.

"About eleven kilometres towards the river."

"Well, Andrew, I guess this is where we go into the ivory business?" I laughingly asked.

"You bet we do, Carl, and we must move camp quickly before the herd moves on. They may be twenty miles away to-morrow night."

So before the sun set we were several kilometres nearer the river. Despite an early start, the fierce sun of high noon was making us very uncomfortable before we had managed to fight our way through the heavy elephant grass to the place where the herd had been sighted. We decided to rest for the afternoon and make an early start next day. The herd had departed, but had left plenty of tracks. If they were really on the move we might as well have turned back straight away. If they were grazing near we had plenty of time next day. A leopard serenaded our camp during the night

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with blood-curdling cries that yet were half human. Andrew half woke, listened and promptly turned over to sleep again. I perforce had to try to do the same. Before I left Indo-China I could do the same. It was just a matter of thinking: "Well, there is another leopard down on his luck because he has missed a monkey!" and turning over to sleep. But it was a horrible sound.

We were hurrying through breakfast at three a.m. It was still dark when we set off, Andrew carrying a flashlight, following in the general direction in which the herd went. Just as darkness was lifting we sighted the herd feeding on bamboo shoots. Long streaks of light were shooting across the sky and the weaver bird was announcing the rising of the sun, but it was impossible yet to distinguish the males from the females. In that light the feeding animals looked like great grey rocks. Alone, I should have walked into the middle of them without realizing what they were.

We crouched low, waiting for the light to improve. Then we carefully shifted our position until two large males on the herd's outer flank were within range. However, they were still not in a position to make a shot reasonably safe. The only safe place to hit an elephant is in the head, preferably round about the eyes. Otherwise the thick skull will make even the heaviest bullet ineffective, and the hunter will have to face the most terrifying of all charges. A wounded bull elephant charging and screaming is, if not as dangerous as the charge of a *sladang*, a much more frightening experience. The two bulls in front of us presented difficult targets. One was facing our way, but the other was exposing a three-quarters back view, which made a killing shot impossible.

Andrew whispered to me, "Carl, I am going to work round a hundred feet or so to the left and get a shot at the difficult fellow. You keep your gun trained on the

vulnerable spot of the one facing you. The instant you hear my gun, fire."

It sounded all right, but I felt horribly alone when he had disappeared in the undergrowth. I kept my eyes fixed steadily on the big fellow in front. He didn't move. He just flapped his great ears lazily, but all around me the female elephants were on the move as they fed. Grey forms loomed above the high grass, like huge grey ghosts in the morning haze; grunts and crashes came from all directions. I seemed to be alone in the jungle with more than fifty wild elephants. It was terrifying. My hands on the gun were none too steady as I waited for the shot that would send the great herd careering in a panic around me. It was at that thought and at the sound of a shrill trumpeting near at hand that my finger on the trigger gave a nervous twitch. I fired before Andrew had given the signal. Worse still, I missed the brain shot and hit the elephant a glancing blow on his tough forehead. It stunned him, but only for a second. Then he raised his great head, his ears sticking out and his trunk high, and trumpeted with an ear-splitting scream of pain and rage. As he charged I pumped shot after shot into his open mouth and eyes. Still he charged on, a mountain of angry flesh. I jumped wildly into a bamboo thicket, clutching a clip of bullets and trying to reload at the same time. As he reached the spot from which I had fired there came the terrific report of Andrew's gun. The great brute staggered and fell, so close to me that I felt the breeze as he came down. In case he was not finished I circled the bamboos and completed my reloading.

The rest of the herd crashed through the jungle and fled. Andrew came out and surveyed the fallen monster.

His only comment was, "That was a close shave! I expected to find you trampled."

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Not a word about the way I had spoilt his chance at the other male by firing too soon. He waved aside my apologies and thanks, and made allowances for the novice at elephant shooting. Fortunately, it was a splendid kill. The great tusks weighed well over a hundred pounds. Yet, as I walked round the huge mound of flesh and watched the bearers hacking out the tusks, I saw again the great bull as he was before he charged, and wished that we had let him live on. The next day we started back; there were no more elephants to shoot, and I was glad. Shooting the real "killers" of the jungle was one thing, but the majestic elephant was a different proposition. But I was extremely grateful to Andrew for some of the most exciting and thrilling moments in my life.

But he hadn't finished with me, even then.

CHAPTER XV

SNAKES ALIVE!

BACK in Siemreap Andrew offered me a lift the three hundred kilometres into Saigon. He was going down in any case to get some heads mounted, so I jumped at the chance. In an incredibly short time—or so it seemed after our jungle adventures—we were strolling through the wide shaded streets of a friendly French city. We passed such evidences of sophistication and culture as the Municipal Opera House and a vast square, in the centre of which a typically French Cathedral flaunted twin spires of red brick to the tropical sun, in defiance of the white and sun-baked walls of the rest of the city. A cinema, ablaze with banners, advertised an American picture about three years old. Soft rippling laughter came from balconies, and the shrill voices of children playing games in some of the up-to-date tropical gardens of French homes, made an interesting change after the night howls of leopards and the chatter of monkeys.

But that was later. We arrived at the hour of siesta to a dead city. I even wondered why I had chosen to come. It was in the evening that Saigon came to life. Then it was wonderful. There was the lovely care-free, bright atmosphere of a French city, the cafés on the boulevards, the strolling crowds, the tinkle of ice in long glasses, and the call of "Garçon! garçon!" the excited discussions, the glitter and the lights; while all this was under a velvet sky, with a soft seductive breeze redolent of lotus blossoms and all the languid lovely scents of a tropical night to add to the gaiety and charm of France. And beautiful Annamite girls

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in bright sarongs, pouting with full scarlet lips and mechanical smiles the old invitation, which is not only French but is world-wide and universal: "Monsieur come with me?" provided the touch of sordid reality that made it possible to believe that this was a real city set in a real jungle, and not an incredible Paris floating round the world.

So we lived for our evenings, Andrew and I; he because he was on holiday in France again; I, because I grew to love Saigon as I had already grown to love Andrew. I hated to think of the time when I must leave them both.

One morning we visited the Rue Paul Blanchet, where an arched gateway bore the mystic words, "Manufacture d'Opium." Settled snugly around a palm-grown courtyard were the various buildings where opium was made and stored. From Laos, from Tonkin and from India came the poppy-juice. I saw again the millions of white and orange poppies that had grown in such great drifts along the jungle road from Siemreap. All those acres of beauty were reduced to sticky balls of gum, the size of coconuts, and covered with poppy leaves. Packed in bales they poured into the factory from all over Asia. By camel caravans and bullock carts, by coolies and river-packets, they came to be poured into huge melting pots.

Within the main enclosure was a heavily barred building where great copper kettles stood in rows surrounded by steam, like huge witches' cauldrons. A sickly-sweet smell rose up to the ventilators above the dark beams of the roof and permeated the whole building. There the raw opium was steamed and stirred with wooden spatulas until it was the consistency of dough. Further on it was spread in thin layers over brass bowls and heated until it peeled off in tissue-like layers. The third stage was merely a refining process. The thin layers of opium were soaked for twenty-four hours and then filtered through pith. The residue was boiled and refiltered so that none was

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wasted. It was then all boiled again for hours in enormous vats to remove any water remaining. The finished product was poured into huge drums, each enough to stupefy the inhabitants of a big city. After three or four months it is released into pipes or tubes holding from five to one hundred grams, and sent to the Collector of Customs for sale to licensed dealers. One hundred thousand kilograms or so left that factory every year.

That evening we sat under a shady umbrella at a little café on the boulevard. At the table on the right was the French specialist, Dr. Montill, of Saigon, who had recently announced to the world a ninety-nine percentage cure for leprosy made from menthylene blue. He suggested that we should visit the Pasteur Institute as soon as the long cooling shadows of the late afternoon appeared. Andrew was engaged for the afternoon so I set off alone to see the snake serum made. The fascination that snakes held for me, even though I feared and disliked them as much as most people do, made me anticipate the visit with considerable interest. I knew that, unlike the Institute at Bangkok, where they keep thousands of snakes on a farm and "milk" them periodically for the poison, the Pasteur Institute at Saigon bought their snakes alive, extracted the poison and then killed the snakes.

The cobra, the ringed krait, and the Russell's viper, all very deadly, made up the chief ingredients of the serum. I watched, fascinated, while the snakes were held by two attendants, a thin glass disc forced between upper and lower jaws and the poison sacs emptied by pressure applied at the back of the head. The snake was then neatly beheaded. The assistant laughed when I suggested that a guillotine would be more appropriate. He promised to fit one up straight away if I would hold the snakes in position, but he wouldn't guarantee my fingers.

We were still laughing when a messenger came running. My doctor guide shouted over his shoulder

as he hurried off, "Follow the messenger!" When we arrived the doctor was already bent over a girl of thirteen or so who had been bitten on the foot by a cobra two and a half hours before. Three hours is the time limit for a cobra's bite. Her condition was serious. She was barely conscious, with vomiting and heart repression but no swelling. Forty c.c. of cobra serum was injected, then twenty c.c. of serum for all snakes in case the relatives were mistaken, and a heart shot of anadrelin to help in the fight. Her recovery savoured of magic. She sat up almost at once. I asked her, through the doctor, what pain she suffered. She replied by placing her folded hands on her cheek and inclining her head. "No pain—only sleep."

Two other patients were treated during the two hours I was there. One man was bitten by an unknown species of tree-snake. His face was swollen out like a balloon. Forty c.c. of all snake serum was injected. The pain, which had been almost unbearable, was relieved almost at once. A young man was brought in. He had been bitten by the most deadly of all snakes, the yellow and black ringed krait. Almost an hour had elapsed. His condition was extremely serious. The cure was just as miraculous, but not so obviously startling. He regained consciousness but could not sit up. The krait both paralyses the nervous system and dilutes the blood. The doctor told me, as the man was carried out, that it would take a month or more for him to recover completely. A little longer and he would never have recovered.

To make the serum that saves the thousands of lives that the Institute rescue every year, requires poison from nearly three hundred deadly snakes every *week*. A small number of people, members of the same tribe, supply the bulk of these. They made a good living at their dangerous job at only four cents apiece for ordinary snakes, the king-cobra fetching twenty-five

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cents. The king-cobra is very large and very difficult to capture, and always requires two men.

Just as I was leaving, an old man, wearing only a faded and long-used breech clout, brought in a bag full of cobras. He was about sixty years old and for the last twenty years had been the Institute's most regular and dependable source of supply. I walked back, interested to see how he would get the cobras out of the bag and into the large tub half full of water which stood ready to receive them. To my surprise and horror—I was standing quite close—he put his hand into the bag, pulled out a handful of cobras, which, with spread hoods, were lashing out in every direction, and calmly counted them out, dropping them one at a time into the tub. He carried on calmly until the bag was emptied. And that was his daily routine.

The doctor, noticing my interest, introduced me to the old man. When I rather tentatively suggested that I would like to see him at his work, he smiled a toothless but very friendly grin and agreed. Early next morning, Andrew, rather amused at my choice of snakes as a source of entertainment, drove me out to the Laos village in the hills where the old man lived. He himself preferred to make his trophies an excuse, and left me to my fate, promising to fetch me later in the day. I was wearing a sun helmet, khaki shirt and shorts, and had put on high riding boots. In my pocket was a packet of serum and a hypodermic needle which the doctor at the Institute had given me, so I felt fairly well armed.

In the village was a pet mongoose, the natural enemy of the cobra. I bribed one of the boys to let me take Ricky Ticky along with me, not for the added protection, but because I had always wanted to see a fight between these ancient duellists. The mongoose was a small animal, rather like a weasel. He was a very nervous little gentleman, with pointed nose and very sharp

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teeth, but he rode quite happily on my shoulder and nibbled gently at my ear.

We set off, a strange procession. The old man went in front along narrow paths across the fields and the rice-paddys towards a low hill covered with short brush. I followed with the mongoose wrapped round my neck. Two of the young men of the village followed carrying gunny sacks and short paddles of thin wood, ornately carved, and about three inches wide and twenty inches long. The old man carried a bamboo pole about four feet long with a raw-hide loop at the end. Each man was also carrying a small blackish gum ball about half as big as a golf ball. The doctor had explained to me the use of these. Compounded from the gums of various trees and plants, the formula a secret unknown to any white man, these balls were the only protection the barefooted and almost naked natives carried. A curse would rest on the whole tribe if the secret were given away or lost. When bitten by a snake they wet the ball with saliva, rub it briskly over the wound, then flatten it over the spot, where it sticks tight. The doctor had told me of two cases where he had injected snake serum after a bite and the ball had immediately come loose from the wound.

Two hours' walking brought us to a spot on the hillside just above the rice-paddys, where the ground was honeycombed with holes. The men got straight to work, each kneeling before a hole and tapping the ground above it with the wooden paddle. To my astonishment out popped a cobra's head with spread hood, very annoyed that someone was knocking at the front door. The cobra was barking, making a sound rather like "moo-oo," which is why the natives call the cobra "ngu-hau," the "barking snake."

Quick as a flash each native grabbed his snake by the neck with one hand, yanked him out of his hole, and popped him into the bag which was held ready in

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the other hand. There was no ceremony or fuss and bother. Each snake meant just another four cents. After watching them catch dozens it no longer seemed the black magic it did at first, but just an every-day thing that anyone might do. Having the serum with me I was almost tempted to try the trick myself, but I let it stay at almost. Probably just as well.

When the men had worked most of the holes in that particular section they prepared to move off to another place. The day was very sunny and hot. I wondered whether we should find any snakes in the open and how they would capture one in those circumstances. I remembered the mongoose, too, whose presence I had nearly forgotten. I didn't like to suggest turning a snake loose to provide me with the demonstration I wanted. I hadn't long to wait. As we moved across a bare stretch of ground to get round the hill a snake appeared in the open. It was a cobra, rearing up with spread hood. The old man approached from the front, kneeling down about four feet from the snake. He feigned a pass with his left hand. The snake struck down. Quick as a flash the man's right hand had grabbed the snake round the neck. In the split second the cobra had been stretched out with the force of its own strike he had seized it. Into the bag it went. An amazing performance!

All this time the mongoose had made no sign that it had even seen the snakes. I began to wonder if he really did attack them, so I made signs to the old man. He grinned and soon located another cobra out in the open. It was a big snake, too, that reared up some two and a half feet from the ground and spat out and barked with great gusto. I put the mongoose down and loosed its cord, some twenty feet from the snake. The mongoose paid no special attention, but the snake was watching warily. They were fighters, but each in its own way. The mongoose did not approach at once,

but nibbled at some leaves. Still nibbling, and apparently not in the least bit interested, he began to circle slowly round. There was a ridge of slightly higher ground just to the left of the snake. The mongoose, still disappointingly cool and uninterested, gradually closed in and made for the higher ground. Then he advanced until he was just under the cobra's hood. He reared up to be nearer the height of the snake, and poked his sharp nose within six inches of that fierce head. Then I noticed that he had become twice his former size by making all his hair stand out on end and presenting a false target to the cobra.

This was too much for the cobra. It struck out with all its strength. The mongoose side-stepped neatly and was after the snake again in a second, snapping vicious teeth. Several times the performance was repeated, with the snake getting a little more tired each time. At the next strike the mongoose dashed in so quickly that the eye could scarcely follow him. The next second there was a thrashing confusion of snake and mongoose. The cobra was trying to loop its coils round the mongoose, which hung on like a little bull-dog. Every time the mongoose got clear. The cobra weakened: still the ball of fur hung on grimly. He dragged the limp snake along the ground to straighten its body. It coiled up again. At last it lay stretched out straight—dead.

The mongoose took no chances. He made quite sure before loosing his fierce grip. At last he left the snake without even a glance back, and nonchalantly nibbled leaves again. One of the boys picked him up and we returned along the narrow field paths. The late sun shone on the naked oily backs of the three men with their loads of deadly snakes, soon to be turned into life-saving serum. Andrew, good old Andrew, was waiting for me. Two days later we were back in Siemreap, and Andrew was waving to me. It was good-bye once again. Good-bye, and good hunting, Andrew!

CHAPTER XVI

POPPY DREAMS AND A NEW ADVENTURE

A LITTLE bird had whispered that it wasn't really necessary to go two thousand odd miles to get from Angkor to Burma. The barrier of the Malay Isthmus could be jumped—at a price. From Saigon to Singapore meant nine hundred miles of the South China Sea, then through the Straits of Malacca and a thousand miles or more to reach Rangoon. The price of dodging the beaten track, of making the short cut through the jungle of Siam and over the mountains to Burma—the difficulties and dangers involved—was offset by its appeal to my pocket and its challenge to my pride.

What had been done could be done—or so I thought. And my informant was sure that it had been done. He wasn't at all sure that a white man had done it. Only by natives, and then only with the aid of elephants, had that short cut been forced. But goods had been smuggled, and presumably were still being smuggled, over this mountain route into Burma. That was the last straw. Elephants and smugglers! Who could resist the combination? I didn't try, but headed straight back to Bangkok.

It was too late for the rest of the story to have its proper deterrent effect. It was too late to tell me that this short cut involved travelling through one hundred and fifty miles of country that received the heaviest rainfall in the world. Where the rain never seems to stop. That its tropical steaming heat was a forcing ground for the thickest and most tangled and impenetrable jungle known. Where the tiger and the

python, the wild elephant and the crocodile, huge monkeys, vicious leopards, and even the dreaded rhinoceros found their homes and hunting-grounds. The pull of the romantic combination of a smuggler's trail followed on the back of an elephant was enough to outweigh these tremendous disadvantages—especially when so many previous impossibilities had turned out to be pleasant possibilities.

So, insufficiently warned and more than sufficiently excited, I found myself walking down the moonlit High Street of Aranaya-Pradesa on my way back to Bangkok. This Siamese border town has a small primitive Chinese inn as the only accommodation, and no white man for miles. But sleeping on the floor on a grass mat, just as the Chinese do, did not represent the hardship it would have done a very few months before. It certainly didn't make me lose any sleep.

As I strolled down the main street I smelt a new smell. I thought I knew most of those produced by mankind. But this was definitely a new one—a sweetish odour that I soon traced to a screened doorway. Curiosity killed the cat—but what an interesting life he must have led first! Anyhow, I had to investigate. I lifted the screen and marched boldly in. A crack from the low ceiling pulled me up sharp. The air was blue with smoke. As my eyes became adjusted to the vaporish gloom I could see hundreds of Chinamen sprawled out on long wooden slabs. Through the haze a number of tiny lamps made little flowers of flame. I had walked into an opium den.

The polished wooden slabs were partitioned off with a low railing forming a number of squares on each side of a gangway. In most of them were two or three men grouped round a small lamp placed in the centre so that all could reach it. The men were all stripped to the waist. The lamplight shining on their oily bodies and shaven heads made an unforgettable picture that at

first glance seemed evil incarnate. As I walked down the aisle among the different groups of smokers the forbidding air of vice gave way to a much more sociable atmosphere. The men were leaning on the low rails with considerable sociability, rather like the atmosphere of a rendezvous. They seemed neither to welcome nor resent my presence. When I showed a desire to be friendly several of the men smiled back and showed me their pipes. A young lad and an old man with sunken cheeks invited me to share their cubicle and their lamp. The proprietor came up at that moment—a fat and serene old Chinaman.

I was soon installed as one of a triangle. Two fresh pipes of opium for my companions were soon ordered with the aid of signs. The old man proceeded to demonstrate the art of opium smoking. It was quite a business. An opium pipe cannot be carelessly smoked. The old man rested his head on a wooden pillow which brought his head to the height of the lamp. Then he twisted a piece of blackish gum, the size of a pea, on to a long needle. Holding it over the lighted lamp until it bubbled and sizzled slightly, he then spread it along the needle with a very thin chip of bamboo. The needle was pressed through the sliver of bamboo, which brought the opium back again to the size and shape of a pea. This was placed in the tiny opening of the pipe which was held by a large bamboo stock. The needle was pressed through the pea to form a small air-hole. The old man then put the pipe in his mouth, placed the bowl over the top of the lamp chimney, which it fitted exactly, and then pulled. Two or three minutes of intense suction were necessary to bring the tiny lamp flame in contact with the opium. One big puff of blue smoke. The pipe was finished.

The intense suction necessary showed why habitual smokers can be so easily recognized. Their jaws become concave, giving their heads the sinister appearance that

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had so alarmed me when I first entered. Several things surprised me. All the smokers were very much awake—none appeared to be sleeping. They all took a long draw on a cigarette, retaining the smoke while they took the opium pipe.

For some time I lay among this group of chatting men—no longer disturbed by the sweet nauseating smell. As I looked round I was, for a moment or two, ruefully conscious that the nearest white man was many, many miles away, and that all the money I possessed was in a belt round my waist. The attendant boys were greatly dismayed that I hadn't yet tried a pipe. My new friends seemed so friendly and so interested in my smoking a pipe that in the end I threw discretion to the winds. I clapped my hands. Two boys came running with cries of pleasure.

I had watched my companions with great care. As they watched in their turn—in fact half the room was interested—I succeeded in producing a great puff of blue smoke. A sense of release and of a great peace came immediately. I stood aside from my usual self and watched my own reactions with the most amazing air of detachment. Peace, joy, happiness reigned supreme. I had only to clap my hands and the whole world was mine. Instead, I found myself with another pipe in my hands. Carefully, and with uncanny control and self-confidence, I produced another burst of blue smoke. I saw the third member of our triangle produce a moon-guitar. I heard him singing an Oriental love-song. This was to assist my "poppy-dreams."

The third pipe fell from my hands before I sailed away. I was lord of all the skies in a cross between an aeroplane and a magic carpet that took me up to the planets. They seemed like bubbles floating in the sky, some huge, some like toy balloons. Then I grew weary of flying. I swooped down in a most exhilarating nose-dive on to the nearest planet.

There I was received by a race of beings as though I were a god, despite the fact that their beauty of face and form surpassed all my previous experience or thought. Twelve of the most beautiful girls—princesses of this wonderful land—closed round me. I should hate to let Mr. Freud loose among the erotic dreams that followed. I should be damned for life. For I was freed of every conceivable repression and floated in a sea of new experiences and untold beauties. My ears were charmed with music, my brain was whirling. Before me appeared a shining lake into which I and my royal escort made ready to plunge. I found myself staring hard at the shining oily back of the Chinese boy as he strummed his guitar and sang his nasal love-songs. I was back to earth again. One part of my mind was still struggling with the fastenings of my royal robes to join my charming princesses, whose white bodies were already skimming the cool lake waters. My conscious mind was guiding my fingers round the fastenings of my money-belt in a prosaic endeavour to prove its safety.

Fortunately the gesture passed unnoticed. My watch told me that all those millions of miles had been travelled in just over an hour. Oh, boy! oh, boy! my head still whirled when I thought back on those wonderful "poppy dreams," but a slightly sick feeling was my chief sensation. My friends, still in their dreams, smiled a farewell. As I passed through the back rooms I saw a number of women. Here, too, were some of the older habitués, almost reduced to human skeletons. Held in the vice-like grip of the "poppy," they knew no escape—only the temporary release of another opium pipe. They were the other side of the picture.

Underneath the stars again, I breathed deeply of the clean night air.

The ticket clerk at Aranaya-Pradesa had a sense of humour. Quite without means of finding out the time of the train, I should have been forced to adopt the

native method of camping out on the station until the train came. Fortunately for me I had seen the smoke of a train the night before as a white plume against the hills some ten miles away. So I lounged at ease on a very dilapidated deck-chair on the veranda of the primitive hotel, drinking untold cups of tea, until the white messenger appeared in the distance. Then with plenty of time to spare I strolled down to the station. My packing took exactly one minute. With an impossibly cheery grin the booking-clerk spent a cheerful and amusing twenty minutes preventing me from buying a ticket. I tried writing, spelling, signs, a map and some most realistic dumb-show, with no success as far as a ticket was concerned, but with the greatest possible success as far as the crowd was concerned. The clerk and I between us brought the house down, but the train arrived before my ticket. I didn't mind not paying—it eased several minor problems—but I wasn't letting that train go. The amused audience were sorry to lose their chief comedian, but they seemed to see my point about the train and gave me a grand send off. As the conductor was just as dense, even if not quite as cheerful, I arrived at Bangkok quite a number of cents to the good.

This time there was no fast gharry to carry me swiftly to the Oriental Hotel, with its stirring memories of Connie. Instead, I hoofed it to a small railway rest-house. There, staying the night but off in the morning over the road I had just travelled, was a fat and jolly Spaniard with his most attractive wife and fat little baby.

We fed in the stuffy dining-room, waited on by a quiet and deft Chinese boy. A lizard ran over the wall and the rain drummed down on the roof. As I entered the dining-room, hot and tired and hungry, the baby pointed his spoon at me, gurgled with delight and called out something which I presumed was the Spanish for "father." Fortunately the real father saw the joke. As a matter of fact, he laughed till his whole body shook,

and his wife laughed and I laughed. The pleasure of the company of these cheerful people helped me to forget the significance of the teeming rain outside. These early rains might make my trip more difficult. It also helped to digest a dinner that was a real half caste affair—neither good Siamese nor good European: cold when it should have been hot, and simply sizzling with curry when it looked cool and inviting.

I was out early next morning on my search for information about the overland route to Burma. Most of it was vague and rather discouraging. Gradually the possibilities emerged. My Spanish friend of the night before put me in touch with a local merchant. He put me in touch with his Siamese foreman and interpreted my wishes. The trail then led to an Indian who was supposed to have come through with a safari of smuggled goods. This man spoke good English, so I took him off to the nearest bar and plied him with drinks. He told me some lurid stories of the teak forests and cobras. Warned me that the route was impossible during the rains. By the time he was ready to confide the actual route to me he must either have been muddled by his drinking, which didn't seem very probable, or he had a warped conception of miles. His story rang true and encouraged me considerably until I got my maps out on my return. Then it made no sense at all.

Eventually, however, I managed to trace at least the approximate route. The Siam Steam Packet Company operated cargo boats on Mei-Nam river, known in Siam as the "Mother of Rivers," to Paknampoh—about three hundred miles. Deck passengers only and no cabins, but that wasn't going to worry me much—I hoped. From Paknampoh another two hundred miles up river to Raheng would have to be done by a chartered launch. Being of an optimistic nature, I relied on there being a launch there to charter.

It was at Raheng that real trouble was likely to begin.

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Ponies or elephants hired from the teak-wallahs would be necessary for the hundred and fifty miles of jungle to the borders of Burma. Getting guides and mahouts was another possible difficulty—had I been looking for excuses. Once the border was reached it was likely to be as easy as taking a tram—just boat and 'bus connections to Rangoon.

Once the border was reached! It sounded fine. Meanwhile I had booked as a deck passenger on a native cargo-boat for a three-hundred mile journey, and the rain was still teeming down as though it would never stop. A friendly visit to the manager's room of my humble hotel brought forth unlimited sympathy, well tinged with the pity usually extended to the feeble-minded; some very good whisky just tinged with water; and a lot of very good advice.

"You'll be able to get fresh meat in the villages," said the manager, "some tough jungle chickens if nothing else, but you'd better take things like flour and sugar and tea with you. A few tinned goods perhaps, and if you can afford it a few bottles of whisky. A nip at night'll help to keep the malaria away. Anyway, it's always a good introduction. I'll give you a note to Suan Hli, my Chinese grocer. He'll fix you up. If the rains hold up you'll enjoy part of the trip, even if you don't get through."

Even if I didn't get through! I had yet to meet anyone who thought I might. But I was going to have a shot, anyhow.

There seemed to be no limit to the resources of the almond-eyed grocer, but there was a definite limit to mine. My note from the hotel manager was a good introduction. It brought a friendly atmosphere into the prosaic transaction.

"Tea, Mister? We have the very best. Sugar—how much did 'Mister' want? Three tins? Very good, and all the tins are quite airtight."

My only other purchases in Bangkok were a mosquito

net, a water-filter, eating tools and a cup and plate. Even then I felt like Father Christmas as I walked down to the boat next morning. Fortunately the weather had cleared. I shook hands with the hotel manager in the damp heat of his office, and left him wrestling with his books and papers.

The cargo boat was very much smaller than I had imagined. The cargo was piled up on the first deck—a motley assortment of bundles of green coconuts, bananas and numerous mysterious bales. At the stern was a small open kitchen where food could be cooked. “Deck passage” is the usual form of native travel in the East, but is seldom used by white people. I was most anxious to try it. Even if I hadn’t been there was no other way. Even if there had been a choice I couldn’t have afforded any other way.

My goods settled in a corner, I stood and gazed around me, oblivious of the bustle of the other passengers arriving. I was on the Mother of Rivers. This broad yellow river was the gateway of Siam. Chinese coolies toiled past in cumbrous, barge-like junks and tied up to near-by wharfs. Soon our propeller churned up the yellow water and we moved ahead until Bangkok was left behind and flat mangrove swamps formed the banks of the river.

Then I had time to turn my attention to my fellow-passengers. Whole families of squatting natives were gathered in groups round the deck. Most of them had come down the river in their paddy-boats with the year’s harvest of rice. Many of their boats were being towed up the river behind our little steamer. Hundreds of them would slip easily down the river loaded with the harvest and be towed upstream, when empty, by a later steam-packet. For all of them this unusual trip was their only sight of a big city. For many it was their first sight. Their excited chatter continued all day and far into the night.

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On board were many most attractive Siamese girls travelling with their families. Many were the bright glances given to a fine group of young men on board. These were the men who had floated down the tremendous rafts of teakwood from the upper reaches of the river and its many tributaries—a task that called for great skill and strength. They looked a fine lot, those boys. One of them, with hair shining like black plumage and powerful muscles in repose, was a beautiful and colourful picture. Barefooted and clad only in a sarong, the golden scarf draped round his neck made him look like a prince.

Each group had its pile of presents and merchandise to take back to the distant homes and villages. Each group had its pile of food and brightly coloured fruits. Most of them had bunches of palm-nuts mixed with the betel-nuts for chewing. All were happy and carefree. Guitars were brought out and haunting melodies floated out over the yellow river. To such a scene of colour and beauty there was only one possible response. Out came my sketch-pad and water colours.

For some time I sketched unobserved. Then one beautiful little urchin—naked as the day he was born—looked over my shoulder. He called another, until everyone's attention was fixed on me. I passed the pictures round as each was finished amidst the greatest possible excitement and pleasure. The slight constraint my presence had caused—unless I had imagined it—melted away. But of all the excitement and pleasure I could only share a very occasional word. Even then I wasn't very sure. I had tried to learn a few words from the hotel manager, but as Siamese is monosyllabic and the same words are used in about eight different "tones," each "tone" altering the meaning radically, it presented great difficulties. It was necessary to be born in Siam to speak Siamese really well, and I was twenty-five years too late for that.

However, a young Siamese came up to me who spoke

some English. He introduced his brother and sister, who spoke English well, and his charming wife, who did not speak English at all but who cooked some exciting-looking food on a little portable charcoal stove. With a natural grace that would have done credit to royalty, they invited me to share their meal.

I soon became very friendly with them and sat in their little group. At least, they squatted and I fidgeted. How these people—and everyone else in the East for that matter—could squat for hours with their knees up around their chins, I did not know. Try it for half an hour and see. I squatted on my heels; knelt down; lay on one side; stretched one leg out and under me, but I never did get used to it.

The family were going up to a small village near Paknampoh for the cremation of a grandmother. They were dressed for the journey in sombre black and white. For the ceremony they would wear all white. All that evening I sat in the family circle. On my right and left were baskets of flowers. As we sat and talked we strung the flowers into garlands, that were later to be draped round the grandmother's corpse. But despite the gruesome task we might have been stringing garlands for a wedding. Everyone was happy.

Then the different groups spread out the grass mats that made their beds. The moon appeared and a thousand stars. We were well up the river. The jungle had closed in, and made a foliage pattern of dark mystery reflected in the moonlit waters. The enchantment of the night dispelled desire for sleep. By my side, leaning against the rail, was the sister of the Siamese husband. She was only nineteen. Education in an American mission school had left her as unsophisticated and charming as any of her compatriots. Her ebony hair seemed to absorb the moonbeams. But her eyes shone as she gazed up at me and told me of the customs and lives of her own people, speaking in a low

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and beautiful, almost husky voice to avoid disturbing the sleepers all round us. I could only look back into those lovely eyes and envy the fortunate Siamese boy who would one day gaze into them and talk of very different things. But the restless movements of the nearest sleepers drove us back to the rest of the group. I was soon asleep on my hard bed with only a canopy of star as company. And my thoughts.

I was awakened next morning before dawn by the whistle of the boat and the chattering of monkeys. We were pulling in to a little village for more fuel. A huge banyan tree was full of indignant monkeys. At the little landing stage a small group of very primitive natives were gathered. They placed a wrinkled old woman on board and then helped the sailors to load up a pile of wood for the boiler. That done, they turned and vanished down a jungle path without so much as a single glance back. As the livid light of their flares died away, only a dark sheet of jungle remained where for a few minutes all had been bustle and activity. Just before dawn a puffing steam-packet passed us, towing empty paddy boats in a long string. Showers of sparks flew up from the wood-burning boiler and threw eerie shadows across the waters.

Eventually we reached Paknampoh. My Siamese friends had dropped off the boat many miles below. A boat came off to meet them. The transfer was made in midstream. A clever piece of work that called for considerable skill on the part of both the men in the boat and the sailors. We merely slowed down slightly. As we put on full steam again I waved a sad farewell. I had resisted a very pressing invitation to stay with them in their jungle village. I regretted my decision when a slim figure detached itself from the waving group and waved a separate farewell to me. The stretch of yellow water widened between us. Their boat turned and was lost to view as we rounded a bend.

CHAPTER XVII

ON THE TRAIL OF THE ELEPHANTS

AT Paknampoh, the little town at the confluence of those great rivers, the Mae Yome, the Mae Narn and the Mae Ping, there was a railway station and a cinema. There I met two Danes, who had come down on the little railway that ran to the head of the teak valleys. They had started off some rafts of teak for their company and had raced the rafts downstream.

After the cinema show they took me back to their bungalow and fed me well on tinned Danish food. They were good fellows. They insisted on my staying the night, and I didn't want much pressing. Over the inevitable whisky and some real beer they regaled me with stories of elephants and tigers, of teak-wallahs and snakes. They shook their heads over my proposed overland trip. It might be done, but——! The rains were heavy in the north. All the tributaries were roaring down. The logs of teak were due at any time, and they only moved downstream when the rivers were full. It might be easier in the West.

"Anyhow, we'll give you a note to Burns. He's away up somewhere on the Mae Wang. If you can get in touch with him he'll let you have elephants from the workings at Raheng. There's an old crock of a launch will take you up the Mae Ping to Raheng. You may get over between the little rains and the big monsoon. Or you could perhaps wait six weeks. We'll give you a good time and show you the real jungle and the life of a teak-wallah."

Unfortunately I couldn't wait. So next day I went

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with my Danish friends—whose rafts were still on the way—to the local office of the Siam Steam Packet Company. Here they arranged for me to have the old steam launch to take me up the river. The old tub was certainly a bit of a wreck but it was the only one available. The fierce current and the numerous whirlpools made it necessary to have a launch up the stream or I would have hired one of the native dugouts and crew. The Danes chose a crew of two Siamese boys for me. Piling in green coconuts for drinking water, and placing my slight baggage on board, I left the crew to get up steam, while I went back for a last civilized meal before I faced the one hundred and twenty miles of lonely jungle river.

We had tiffin on the shady veranda overlooking the compound lawns, and mighty peaceful and enjoyable it was. The Siamese "boy" was certainly some cook. But all good things come to an end. The two Danish boys came down to the boat with me. The old launch, puffing away and nearly shaking itself to pieces, swung out into the wide river. My crew, with the broadest grins, stood with me in the stern and waved good-bye.

In the afternoon sun the river looked like a sheet of beaten gold, with splotches of green like Chinese jade where bunches of java weeds floated down. One of these bunches caught in the propeller of the boat. Overboard went one of the boys and cleared it away. Then off we chugged again. I took the wheel, feeling like the captain of a liner. The course was a zigzag one—trying to dodge those floating weeds.

That night we tied up at a little village. We climbed up the bank after tying the boat up securely. Having reached the village the boys made directly for the temple, which was surrounded by a compound of outhouses. To my amazement my baggage, such as it was, was taken right into the temple itself. Some grass mats were spread directly in front of the great bronze Buddha

on its pedestal. I glanced somewhat fearfully at the yellow-robed priest and the young bonzes standing round. They smiled amiably back at me. It was obvious that they and my boys regarded the whole proceedings as a matter of course. Surely nowhere in this world can religion be more tolerant and kindly than in Siam.

The boys went into the outhouses to prepare supper. It was quite dark when they returned. I had my supper by the light of a lantern, immediately underneath the great Buddha. Little glass and silver ornaments suspended from the roof caught high lights from the lantern and tinkled softly in the evening breeze. Little coloured flags fluttered around the walls. From the outhouses came the faint murmur of the men. Never have I eaten a meal in such romantic and peaceful surroundings.

I lit a cigarette and strolled out of the temple compound. The sighing of the trees and the distant laughter of brown maidens made the peaceful night almost unbearably full of emotions. Home-sickness, awe, loneliness, excitement, and a thrilling awareness that this was what I had wanted—this was what I had always needed—swept over me in turns.

Through the gateway I saw one of the boys crossing over to the temple. I went back into the compound. The light of his lantern shone on the red tongues of the fierce-looking dragons that guarded the temple. In one hand he held the lantern and my bottle of whisky. In the other was a jar of filtered water.

So I drank my evening tot to the kind gods of that hospitable temple. Then I crept on to the grass mat underneath my mosquito net. Still with a strong sense that this was all unreal, I extinguished the lantern. But I slept without a dream. I rubbed my eyes when I woke up. My bath was waiting out in the temple compound under the interested gaping of those red-

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mouthed dragons. The water steamed in the cool morning air and a mist hung over the river. There was I, captain of a ship, and my trusty crew busy with the important business of breakfast. Rangoon was an unimportant spot on a map thousands of miles away. I was travelling. Whether I arrived or not ceased to matter.

On to the weedy bosom of the great Mae Ping again I soon had reason to know that I was alive. A few hundred mosquitoes, sand flies, and the clinging attentions of sweat-bees made it quite certain that this was not a dream. But as I steered my boat up the river I was supremely, idiotically happy. For mile after mile we chugged merrily along—the tall and graceful trees slid past. We reached the whirlpool rapids at Kambheng. It was a wicked-looking stretch of water. The whirlpools shifted all round us—a smaller boat would have capsized—but we got steadily through. Sometimes, rounding a bend, we surprised a troupe of monkeys, drinking at the water's edge. Along the leafy air-ways by the side of the banks we occasionally saw great silvery gibbons, some with babies on their backs climbing swiftly along. Once we saw a snake swimming—a queer sight—like seeing a piece of green rope twisting along through the water.

Parrakeets flew from tree to tree with a chatter and screech. At the slightest excuse—the chug-chug of our engines or the scamper of a gibbon through the trees—a crowd of black and white plover would rise up into the air shrieking “Did you do it? Did you do it?” until I wanted to yell back at them, “No, I didn’t!” There were blue and gold kingfishers, and sometimes the raucous cry of the hornbill as his great wings went swishing through the air. I was relieved to have seen no snipe or duck. The Danish boys at Paknampoh had warned me that the presence of duck and snipe were the surest signs of the real rains. But there were

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comical-looking pelicans. As I had never imagined pelicans existing anywhere but in the Zoo I watched each one with great interest. They were certainly one of the chief factors in giving this journey a dream-like quality that my night in the temple had begun.

The second night we missed the village. At least, darkness was too near to enable us to push on to it, if we hadn't already passed it. So we tied up at a sand bank and made our fire. That night we fed royally on chicken and on eggs that were fresh enough not to need currying. We slept on board. The sand bank was hard and uncomfortable, although still warm. During the halt for the mid-day meal the bare feet of the boys could not touch the blistering sand, but before morning I was shivering. Visions of fevers and malaria passed through my head, but the warm sun soon dispelled them.

CHAPTER XVIII

LOST IN THE JUNGLE

ON the evening of the third day we arrived at Raheng and tied up to a rickety wharf. I found the local office of the Borneo Teak Wood Company, but the Siamese clerk in charge told me that Mr. Burns was away up the river Mae Wang on a tour of inspection. The clerk directed me to Mr. Burns's bungalow. To my delight, I found a white man in possession. There is an understanding among the teak-wallahs, even of rival firms, that they can use each other's premises. This man was staying over for the night while on a cross-country journey.

Soon I was sitting on a comfortable cane chair with a long drink in front of me. The simple needs of my boatmen had been attended to, a telegram had been set off, and I settled down to the luxury of a decent bungalow and a yarn.

"Burns is about two days' journey away," said this new friend, whose name I have unfortunately forgotten. "He may be coming back in a few days or he may be going up towards Nakon. Probably going up the Mae Wang. If you want to get elephants you'll have to get hold of him soon. There's no one else can let you have them, and elephants are certainly your only chance of getting through to Burma. It is a suicidal sort of trip, anyway. But that's your funeral. It is virgin jungle, and I doubt if you can ford the rivers, even with elephants, for another six weeks."

"Well, I've come five hundred miles to try," I replied. "If I don't, I've got three thousand miles to go round

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by the regular tourist trip, and, apart from the distance, I want to avoid that."

"Can you ride?" he questioned.

"Elephants or horses?" I asked.

He grinned. "Ponies, I meant, and fairly wild ones at that."

When I told him that I had ridden horses almost from childhood he looked relieved.

"In that case I'll fix you up with a mount for a few days and get Burns's pony-boy and a grass-cutter to go with you. I've a rough idea where Burns is likely to be, and you'll soon pick up his trail. He's taken the bullock-carts with him, so he won't be going very fast."

Plans made for the morning, we settled down to talk of teak and elephants. I learnt how the great teak trees grew in the dense jungle of those valleys; how they were killed by ringing the bark and left for two years. When they were sawn down after that length of time they would float, whereas, green, they would sink immediately. The huge logs were dragged by elephants to the rivers in the dry seasons. When the rains came every tributary carried its quota, which was floated downstream while the river was full and collected in huge rafts. It was anything up to six or seven years before the trees reached the sawmills at Bangkok. The usual method was to work one tributary and then another. When all the teak growing round one side creek had been dragged to a stream large enough to float it, felling was started in another. Not till each tributary was clear was another batch floated down, or the jams would have been continuous.

The greatest part of a teak-wallah's job apparently consisted of "inspecting." It sounded easy, but the description I heard that night proved it to be a very exacting and difficult task. To make certain that all the teak trees on both sides of a creek several miles

long had been ringed was the beginning. In some of the thickest and worst jungle in the world that was no easy matter. Then it was necessary to inspect the felling. As my host put it, "You have to climb up hills and down into deep valleys, through undergrowth dripping moisture and so steaming with the heat that it is impossible to keep a cigarette dry long enough to light it. Then you crawl through a tangle of small trees brought down by the fall of the teak tree until you can climb on to the fallen giant and see that the headman has 'logged' it without waste and yet made full allowance for any cracking and splitting. The red ants get shaken down your neck, leeches cling to your legs, and you're lucky if you avoid mud-sores as well!

"Then you get 'stump inspection.' The elephants push the logs down the slopes and drag them along special 'roads.' When they reach the river bank the logs have to be hammered and measured. Four kinds of marks have to be hammered on, so that the Bangkok mills can tell the source, the date and the class of the log and the name of the teak-wallah responsible. The logs then wait in the river bed for the next 'floating rise.'

"But it's the next stage that provides the real excitement. What we call 'ounging' timber. A great log comes swinging down the river. Crash! it hits a rock. It swings broadside round, right across the river. Following logs pile up before we can get the elephants to the jam. Then come the great tuskers. Into the river they go. Even without the mahouts' encouragement those fellows get their great tusks under the very log and heave together. With a crash and a roar the whole jam breaks up. Elephants, mahouts and logs in a swirling mess. The great tusks and huge foreheads fend off the logs that would smash a man to atoms. You won't believe it until you see it how swiftly those elephants move. Up and down the stream elephants

are working. Imagine me, on a great tusker, riding up and down the bank placing the best elephants at danger points, keeping over a hundred of them busy. Before the water falls again we may get three or four thousand logs out into the main river. By evening, when the rise is over, men and elephants don't need any rocking to sleep, I can tell you.

"Then there's 'rafting'—that's a tricky job—and 'neaping.' A very high river often sinks rapidly and leaves logs stranded high and dry along the banks. These have to be traced and recorded, i.e. 'neaped.' With all that, and the supervision of hundreds of men, full control of perhaps a thousand square miles, the stores of jungle provisions; the accounts; the doctoring of men and elephants; dealing with rogues among both, and a thousand and one odd jobs which may include liquidating a man-eater; it's certainly an interesting and exciting job if you're looking for one. You'll see some of it during the next few days."

Well, I knew that the teak-wood industry was the great romantic industry of Siam, but it took the experiences of the next few days to make me realize the adventurous and romantic history of those heavy, slow, dull logs I had seen at the Bangkok sawmills.

Excitement woke me early the next day, despite my late night and my dreams of elephants and tigers. But my host was already up and a pony boy was waiting for me with two ponies. Determined to show my riding ability, I chose the more spirited of the two—a black. Breakfast over, I went down to the river to see the last of a very fine man. He went down to Paknampoh on the rickety launch that had brought me up. I came back from the landing-stage feeling very much alone in the world. But the pony-boy had everything ready. The grass-cutter was there, and the three of us set out through the little town of Raheng.

We were soon following a cart-road winding between

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the jungle trees. It rained dismally. In places the mud was knee-deep, making riding very difficult. Horse-flies and mosquitoes gave me quite the lion's share of their attentions, but we plodded on and made sixteen miles that day. The night was spent in a little bamboo shanty in a deserted clearing. Eerie and uncomfortable, it was, however, reasonably dry.

The next day was much the same. We had to look out for a narrow path leading off the trail about ten miles from our previous night's lodging. We found it easily. According to information received, this should lead us straight to a village where we might expect some news of Mr. Burns.

But half-way along it divided into two paths. Both looked the same. Both showed the marks of passing bullock-carts. I chose the wider of the two, and for a very good reason. My black pony was still very restless. Riding down the jungle paths was no joke. On either side was a wall of green. Sticking out from the green, and not at all easy to see, were low branches, and sometimes the sharp ends of bamboos, where elephants and their howdahs had forced a passage. The path itself wound in and out, up and down. It was necessary to keep a sharp look-out for mud-holes, fallen trees and other snags so that we proceeded in a series of twistings and duckings that were not made any easier by a restive pony.

I was more concerned with the dangers above. Those wickedly sharp ends of bamboo could easily brain you or put out your eyes. Besides which I was becoming a bit snake-conscious and was inclined to see snakes in the trees. There was a stuffed python draped over a branch of a tree in Burns's garden that had given me ideas. The result was that when the pony tripped over something on a steep bit of the path I was quite unprepared. I half slipped off his back as he stumbled and lurched. The next moment we were flying down

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the steep path at break-neck speed. The pony was scared by my yells—and I was yelling with the pain of a dozen or more prickles decorating my thigh and lower spine. When we did stop, the pony-boy came galloping up, scared out of his wits. I had to lean forward, standing on my stirrups in a most undignified posture, while he pulled out the long prickles. I had sat right on a thorn-bush covered with needle-sharp thorns nearly two inches long.

It grew late. There was still no sign of the village we should have seen long before. My clothes were clammy with the rain and with perspiration. It was getting cool. In my damp clothes I was beginning to shiver violently. A mile or two farther on I called a halt to question the pony-boy. He didn't know where we were. There were no landmarks of any sort. It looked as though we would have to spend the night in the tall jungle that towered up in grim silence on either side of the path. A most uncomfortable thought. I was shivering, and the two boys looked nearly as miserable as I felt.

While we were still debating in the darkness, the ears of my pony pricked up. Then came the welcome sound of a native singing a high whining chant to keep away the frightening thoughts of the darkening and lonesome jungle.

We called out. The chant died down to a fearsome silence. The pony-boy called out words of reassurance and the man slowly appeared. When the pony-boy asked for the village we were seeking—Ban something or other—he laughed and pointed over the trees, spreading his arms to their widest extent. We were certainly well out of our way.

So we followed him down an even narrower path, leading our ponies in the darkness. It was fortunate for us that some brown maiden's charms in a distant village had kept him out later than he intended. It

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was very seldom that any of the villagers were out after darkness had fallen.

As the last faint vestige of light disappeared we arrived at a tiny village. The headman, a cheerful little man dressed in a pair of dark blue jungle pants, came quickly out when he heard the ponies. My pony-boy explained the position, and in a moment or two all was bustle and excitement. The headman called to his wife. A wrinkled old lady with kindly eyes came at his call and salaamed deeply. Despite my rather insincere protests, she soon made arrangements for my comfort. A beautiful little sloe-eyed daughter came down the ladder of their little shanty and, shyly glancing at me, stepped across to a neighbouring house.

In a few minutes I was taken into a little courtyard. A rickety ten-foot ladder led up to the one-roomed shanty—the headman's own home, placed at my complete disposal. The walls were of plaited cane and the floor of split bamboo, and a thatch of grass kept out the rain. Primitive—but didn't I bless its comfort! A great fire had been lit in the courtyard below, and the boys enjoyed its heat while they dried my clothes. I sat at the door, wrapped in a blanket, and revelled in its dry warmth. The scene will stand out in my memory for years to come. The whispering darkness of the encroaching jungle, the flame-lit courtyard below, the excited chatterings of the people in the other jungle shanties, which appeared and disappeared as the flames flickered up or died down, and the three tethered ponies grouped around a pile of grass. I sat above it all, wrapped in my blanket and my thoughts.

My host's pariah dog crawled up the ladder, sniffed at my feet and then turned and crept down again. He evidently didn't see why he should be turned out of his home like the rest of the family, but on investigation didn't relish sharing it with me. I wasn't sorry either. Every shanty had its dog, usually a hungry-looking,

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mangy yellow animal, but they weren't very attractive pets. The ants I had shaken off the trees when I made contact with the thorn bush had fallen down my neck, and they had made enough red marks on my anatomy for one night, without the help of the irritant dog-fleas of the pariah.

However, I set to and ate a glutinous mess of eggs and rice cooked by the headman's wife and served up by his daughter. Even that and the ant-bites, the draught through the bamboo floor, a certain amount of saddle soreness and the strangeness of my bedroom failed to keep me awake. I slept well.

Soon after dawn we were up. Breakfast was green bananas and rice, and then we set off—with a guide this time. It appeared that Mr. Burns was not very far away, and my thoughts went racing ahead to the smugglers' trail again. By devious jungle paths we made our way back to the cart-road we had missed before. There, with only one hour's ride ahead to where Burns was reported to be, the headman turned back. I didn't understand a word of what passed between him and the pony-boy, but the pantomime and the smile on his face seemed to say, with considerable humour, "Well, there's your path, and I doubt if even you could get lost on that before you reach the village." In the same way he made no sign when I handed him four new "tical" notes—ample payment for my lodging—but his back was eloquent of satisfaction and pleasure.

The next hour's riding was easy. My attention could be given entirely to speculations as to this Mr. Burns I was going to meet. The office at far-away Bangkok had said he would help me. My Danish friends had been really enthusiastic about him. The bungalow had given evidence of care and, indeed, of culture that intrigued me. The long time that I had spent trying to find him had given him an importance and a romantic atmosphere that might easily be dissolved in a flash

on meeting. He was quite entitled to say: "Who the hell are you, anyway, chasing me around like this? My elephants have work to do, if you haven't. I've no time to help lunatics to commit suicide." He would have been quite within his rights if he had refused to interrupt his work for my sake. But I had a feeling that all the people who had met him and helped me on my way to him were right, and that he would welcome me. They weren't, I felt sure, just passing me along like an unwelcome parcel of trouble. Certainly the name of Burns had been something to conjure with in the jungle villages we had passed through in these last few days.

Now, as we came to a larger village, we crossed the paddy fields, the stubble glaring in the morning sunshine. We reached the temple compound with the inevitable red-mouthed dragons guarding the walls. Within, shaven-headed, yellow-robed novices moved quietly. Leaving them behind us, we came down the village street. On through the tiny market-place, where smiling brown men, women and children salaamed shyly to the white man, and across an open space to the compound containing the Teak Company's bungalow.

A powerfully-built man in khaki shorts, white shirt and topee, with an interesting and amazingly clean-shaven face, was mounting a grey pony as we entered. He rode towards me, holding out his hand.

"Mr. Burns, I presume?" said I. Then I realized the "Stanley-greeting-Livingstone" touch—but too late. Anyhow, there was nothing else to say. He seemed to know all about me.

He turned his pony, and taking my arm in a very friendly manner, soon had me installed in a long chair with a long drink in front of me.

"The office told me you might be along," he said, "but I didn't expect you so soon. As a matter of fact, I didn't really expect you at all until the rains are over.

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But still, if you really can't wait, there's no harm in trying now. I'll fix you up with elephants, but I should say the odds are about a hundred to one against your getting over. However, you will enjoy the experience either way—when you're back home talking about it."

I laughed. "Well, I've come about seven hundred miles to try, so I don't want to go back without an attempt, anyhow. Most things so far have proved easier than I was led to expect."

"Umph! Well, this *may*, but only if you are expecting an awful lot. Those steep mountain sides get about all the rain there is in the world. The path goes by the side of precipices, when it is a path and not a series of mud patches, and—oh, well, I expect you've heard this all before."

"Well," I replied, "not a single man I've met has done anything but try to discourage me, but I'd still like to try. But I must say that even the most discouraging people have been extremely helpful."

"All right, young fellow!" said Burns, "we'll give you a good send-off. To-morrow I've got a nasty job—cremating an elephant, a good tusker, killed by anthrax—then we'll hurry back to Raheng and get you started off."

As I murmured my thanks the boy announced dinner. That evening and night were an extraordinary contrast to the previous one. Freshly cleaned Lao silver bowls and ornaments reflected the light of the lamps. On a beautifully carved round table was set a plate of salted almonds and a whisky decanter. Another example of Siamese silver-ware held cigarettes. The dinner was perfectly cooked and served. A furious burst of rain-laden wind made the windows of that bungalow in the jungle village shake and shiver, but only served to emphasize the security and comfort inside. No sign here of that "letting things slide" for which the tropics are noted. It was an extremely comfortable version of

the English "sahib" dressing for dinner in the midst of the jungle.

When I very gently twitted my host with this during dinner, he replied, with a twinkle in his eyes, "I'll show you the alternative when we get back to Raheng. I am just finishing my third five-year spell as a teak-wallah. This," he said, waving his hand round to indicate the whole pleasant atmosphere, "represents about a year of that time. So it won't pall just yet."

Next morning we rode together through the market-place and then along the six miles of cart-track that separated us from the elephant casualty. I thought for a time that the first elephant I should see in this country noted for its elephants was going to be a dead one. But shortly before we reached the body Burns motioned me to halt. On a road which crossed our path a long procession went past. It was the rest of the herd leaving the district under orders from Burns. There is nothing so contagious as anthrax, and every elephant for a mile or two round was being sent away.

As each elephant went past, Burns told me its name and some of its attributes. To me they were all much the same, only some were bigger than others. I could tell the tuskers from the cows. But to the teak-wallah by my side each one had a history and a personality.

"There goes Mae Noi Bah and her baby," he said, as a cow elephant went past with her calf, "and there goes Auntie." Apparently, as soon as each baby elephant is born a cow elephant from one of the working parties attaches itself of its own accord to the mother and becomes the baby's aunt. Nothing but force will separate the three afterwards until the baby is at least three years old.

"You must remember," he said, "that these elephants lead almost completely natural lives. They only work for a few hours a day, and then graze in absolutely natural surroundings. The babies run entirely free

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until they are five years old, and it needs two guards for a baby elephant in the jungle."

Each of the great tuskers had its likes and dislikes. Some were magnificent at river work, selecting the key logs in dangerous jams and levering them free with hardly a word from the mahouts. Others were better at hill work, hauling down the logs. Some were very much wilder than others and seemed never to get used to working with men. These were relegated to the wilder back areas alone, where they could do little damage to the villages or to other elephants. The Lao men who work these brutes get higher pay and a lot of kudos, but they certainly earn it all. They have a very dangerous and difficult job. Many get killed. The successful teak-wallah has to know his elephants and place them to the work-places like a general disposing of an army to best advantage.

Every now and again the males, the great tuskers, have periods of disturbance known as "musth." They become for a time quite unmanageable and highly dangerous. The only treatment is to fasten them securely to a great tree until they recover. "An oily discharge comes out of their temples," Burns told me. "Fortunately the oil comes out gradually. When it has trickled down as far as the eyes—then look out! If he's not well tied up he'll try to kill anything or anyone in sight. I have seen bullock-carts smashed and the bullocks killed outright. Even their own mahouts run for safety. Of course, these elephants can be shot if they get loose, but as they cost about £600 each that's not a popular remedy. But several villages may live in fear for days and all the work may be disorganized, so you can bet we tie them up well at the first sign."

At the tail-end of the long procession came several "butchas," aged about six years. It was amusing to watch them, with tiny howdahs containing a pail or

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two on their backs, gaining experience on the march. They dashed along behind the big cows, looking as though they were afraid of being left behind. The march for them was one continual rush to catch up, although the headman would see that they were not overstrained.

We then walked back to where the pony-boys were holding the ponies well out of sight of the elephants. Elephants have an instinctive distrust of dogs and horses, although they do not mind buffaloes and bullocks in the slightest.

I learnt more about these great animals as we rode along. One thing elephants can't stand is being exposed to hot sun. I had noticed one of the elephants put its trunk in its mouth, suck up some spittle, and blow the moisture down the sides of its body.

Burns laughed when I mentioned it. "Anyone who has had to walk behind an elephant for any distance in hot weather soon learns that little trick," he said, "and keeps well out of the way."

"There are two more things to remember," he warned me. "An elephant can't turn its head round—its neck is too short. If it wants to look behind it, it has to turn right round. So it doesn't like anything which approaches it suddenly from the rear. And that goes for men, too. The other thing is—it can't jump. It can't take all four feet off the ground at once. So a ditch, which a horse or even a dog can jump, will stop it completely. That fact has saved the lives of several of my men, and saved me some uneasy moments once when a tusker went on 'musth' without warning."

While we were talking the carcase came in sight. I soon forgot the romance of the live elephants in the pathos of that huge still body in front of me. On the great head rested a tiny red forest flower, placed there by the mahout to speed the parting spirit on its last journey. The brown man himself was keeping watch, looking sad and a little frightened.

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He salaamed to Burns, and the two walked round the pathetic mound, taking care not to touch the body. The great legs were doubled up as though it were still in pain. Soon dozens of men piled wood round about in heaps until the corpse was hidden.

As the smoke rolled out and tongues of fire flared up, the sun broke through the dense, dark foliage. A shaft of light lit up the scene and was poised above the burning elephant for several minutes. All the men stood back as though spellbound. It was an awesome and dramatic moment. The memory of that scene, and even the very smell of burning, seemed to accompany us all the way back to Rahcng.

Seeing the town again I realized more clearly what a ramshackle affair it was. A picture of commercial despair, in which Burns's bungalow was almost the only bright spot.

That evening Burns introduced me to the other side of the pukka-Sahib story as he had promised. He took me to the outskirts of the town, and called out as we came to a makeshift sort of bungalow, half-European and half-native in architecture. Two white men lounged to the door and invited us in, rather too cordially. They were bare-footed and unshaven. We sat down on dilapidated cane chairs in a dishevelled living room, while I satisfied their hunger for news from the "outside." All the time cheerful little naked babies and older children trotted in and out. I was introduced to their "wives"—two still-pretty Siamese girls, very attractive in their scanty dress.

These men were foreigners who had come out to work for one of the rubber or teak companies. Some ambitious Siamese mothers had persuaded them to let their attractive daughters—I knew well how attractive some of these Siamese girls could be to a lonely man—keep the bungalows clean and do the cooking. The inevitable happened. Half-caste children had appeared

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on the scene. The fathers had lost their jobs, whether through slackness or because of the complications involved, and here they were—"on the beach," living like natives.

I must say they put up some very good arguments against the ambitions and the restlessness of civilized life. I could not find it in my heart to argue strongly against such a care-free, lazy life. They had philosophized their existence and claimed to be happier as they were. But it didn't ring very true, and it certainly didn't look very comfortable. I took care not to disturb their apparent complacency, but I couldn't help wondering about the children. Cut off from their own race by obvious differences, they would certainly be even more out of place anywhere in Europe. It was only too probable that their own fathers would grow to despise and even to hate them for what had been lost because of them. It was too short-lived a Utopia for me.

It was a relief to return to the bungalow with Burns.

CHAPTER XIX

OFF ON THE SMUGGLERS' TRAIL

A GREAT surge of wind and rain met us as we rode out of the compound next morning. It was just after dawn. For the first few miles it was pleasant open jungle, green glades and gently sloping ground. Spurred on by the rain we urged our ponies forward at a gallop which almost developed into a friendly race.

All too soon we reached the end of the open jungle and came to forest that towered right above the track. The rain increased. A great wind sent the tree-tops tossing and moaning. Bending low over the saddles, eyes strained ahead for snags, we galloped on as fast as we dared—which meant as fast as I dared. Behind us, crouching low, came the pony-boys.

The jungle flattened suddenly. The tall trees gave way to low shrubs and grass. The ponies were stopped and given to the boys to hold. We walked forward and came upon an amazing scene. In front of us, dotted about the open spaces, were over a hundred elephants. They had been brought from the scattered rest camps ready for inspection before being set to work. In that green glade they loomed like giant tombstones as they stood hobbled in their lines.

Some of them required branding or rebranding. The old hot-iron method had been replaced by the use of an acid paste that marked the skin almost painlessly. The older method caused excruciating pain. As it was always administered by white men, and elephants never forget, it added considerably to the teak-wallahs' difficulties.

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I stood and watched Burns for a time. He looked most amusing. In topee and goggles (in case the acid splashed back from the elephants' skin) he made a strange picture as he traced a mystic sign on the stern of one of the kneeling monsters. Without that sign some of the natives might be tempted to smuggle elephants over the borders of Siam—a very profitable pastime.

When he had finished Burns took me along the lines of hobbled elephants and offered me my choice. He showed me his own particular riding elephants and got the mahouts to put them through their paces across the clearing. Their stride was almost unbelievable. "The longest march doesn't seem to tire them," he told me with pride. I admired them tremendously, but needless to say I didn't take advantage of his offer to choose those two. I threw the choice back on to him. He thought for some time and then called out sharply in Siamese.

Two of the mahouts tapped their elephants to a sitting position, climbed up, and in a moment or two were surging up the line towards us. The elephants knelt again and the two brown men came over and salaamed. Burns spoke to them at some length, while they eyed me with good-humoured curiosity. Eventually they salaamed themselves away and went off down the clearing at a good pace.

"They've gone to fetch the howdahs," explained Burns. "We'll get you started in the morning. One of the men knows the route and the other thinks he does. Your trouble now will be the language question. I'll write out in Siamese with their English equivalents some of the things you'll need, and you'll have to manage with that."

He was better than his word. As we sprawled at ease in the tent that night I had a real lesson in Siamese pronunciation, and received a long list of phrases

covering many eventualities. But my attempts at pronouncing some of the phrases nearly doubled us up with laughter. At the last minute we remembered that perhaps neither of the men could read. We settled down to sleep with the matter still in doubt.

Morning found the two men and their elephants waiting for me. The reading difficulty was soon solved—both could read after a fashion. Better than I could pronounce, anyway.

What with the good wishes of Burns and the cheerful faces of the assembled mahouts, we had a grand send-off. We were soon swinging through the jungle trail towards the mountain pass of Mesoht and the Burmese border. Several varieties of monkeys became our ever-present travelling companions, swinging along in the trees beside us like small boys following a band. The only excitement was when the young dog belonging to the first mahout resented the presence of the monkeys, or they resented his presence. There were continual scurries and rushes, punctuated by excited barking and chattering.

Most of the time it was peaceful and quiet. The only sound was when the branches rattled against the howdah as the path closed in in front of us and shut again behind us like a prison door. It was quite oppressively peaceful on the surface. The man made a mistake in letting his dog run along in front of us instead of keeping him on the elephant. As we rounded a bend we heard his excited barking. There was a cobra in the path. We were just in time to see the mongrel pup get his inquisitive nose bitten by the snake. Young cobras are the "jinx" for all dogs. They remain to fight. They get killed all right, but so do the dogs. This pup brought back the dead body in triumph and barked merrily to celebrate his victory. Five minutes later he was strangely quiet and staggered in his walk. Within ten minutes he had keeled over—dead. His master

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was not very deeply concerned, but the incident made a profound impression on me.

The path got steeper and more difficult with every hour. Most of the trail was submerged in water ankle-deep. The great feet of the elephants went in and out with a sucking noise that was most unpleasant. A deepening gloom clung round us as we forged through tunnels of vine-entangled rattans, while great writhing roots across the path, looking for all the world like pythons, made it necessary to watch every step. Around us great stalks of bamboo waved high above, their plumage of green melting into the branches of the Bo or banyan trees.

Somewhere a drum was beating. Far off and at long intervals it pealed its melancholy notes. Always the drums in these forests, the one sign of human life, served merely to intensify the feeling of utter loneliness. Only the drumming of the rain, as the frequent heavy showers poured down, gave rise to the same feeling of isolation. When the heavens opened and the rain poured down in terrifying sheets it seemed to shut us in a watery prison. When the dismal drums sounded they seemed to shut us into a man-made prison bounded by living walls of green.

Riding an elephant for hour after hour was not exactly a joy-ride either. The slow monotonous roll and plunge was most nauseating. Whole armies of insects were attracted to the beasts and remarkably few of them showed any discrimination. They seemed to like me just as well.

However, we finished up the second day in a cloud of glory. The sun broke through. We were dried out in a few minutes. The warm air was loaded with the perfumes of wild flowers and tree-blossoms. We were climbing round one of the foot-hills at the time, with an unobstructed view across and along their great valleys. It was indescribably beautiful. Wave after

wave of every shade of green rolled away into the distance. The moisture-laden air made every colour stand out vividly, but so immense was the canvas and so rich the texture that, in the shimmering heat of the sun as it broke through the clouds, it looked like a vast magic carpet ready to fly away with us across the world. elephants and all. But underneath that magic carpet were all kinds of creeping crawling dangers in a perpetual green twilight dripping with moisture. We slipped and slithered down the precipitous slopes into the depths again.

The third day was terrific. Every step increased the difficulties. The trail was little more than a mud-bath, and the few open spaces and infrequent clearings were seas of mud. It was almost impossible to cross any of the clearings without losing the trail, and once it was lost we had to fight yard by yard through the clutching jungle until we got back again. For hour after hour the rain poured down in drenching sheets that churned mud up so thick that there was often danger that even the elephants would get stuck. The only advantage of the rain was the respite from the attacks of mosquitoes. As though we were not enduring enough, the rain washed numbers of leeches off the branches, or they were swept off the trees and down my neck as the howdah was forced through the upper branches. They were disgusting, horrible things. One fell on the back of my elephant just in front of me. I saw it waving its sightless head to get the right direction, then loop its way along towards me. The smooth, thin black bodies wormed their way to every part of my body and fed to repletion. Then they looked like great fat slugs. Their bite was absolutely painless and they feasted unnoticed until we arrived at camp. Then my boots would be squelching in blood and mud, and great red patches would be on all my clothes. Apart from the danger of poisoning from the ever-present

mud and dirt, more than one man had died from the continual attentions of these disgusting creatures.

Every few miles brought its stream, swollen to a river in full flood. Sometimes we only got across with great difficulty, but a fierce joy and determination had seized me. Another day or two and we would reach higher ground, and our difficulties would at least be different ones.

But it was a great joy and relief to reach a group of jungle dwellings. Only two dozen wretched shacks on stilts, but it meant that we were still on the right trail. The inhabitants turned out in full force to gaze in astonishment at the mud-covered apparitions that appeared before them.

Both men and women wore only a kind of loin-cloth bagging to their knees. The hair of the women was cut to the same length as the men's, and all had black teeth and mouths made foul and red with betel nut, so there was little to choose between them. Children of all ages swarmed around, dressed only in a brass anklet and with a string of beads added for the girls.

Their unprepossessing appearance was belied by their welcome. A palm-thatched hut was placed at my disposal, and my blankets were soon stretched out at one end of a long platform two feet above the floor and about six feet above the swampy ground. I was given the place of honour at the head of the communal bed in the chief's own hut. There was no hotel accommodation in that lonely spot. A sticky mess of rice was brought in by one of the girls, escorted by no fewer than five younger girls who competed for any attentions they could give to my welfare. They sat around and watched my wary attack on the food. I had had one previous experience of native curried rice, when I had burnt myself really painfully, so I was careful.

The hot food was comforting, but my clothes were still soaking, so I shoo'ed my hostesses outside. They

went no further than the doorway, but I was past caring about that. I quickly peeled off the wet garments and wrapped myself in a dry blanket. The crowd round the door made it dark in the hut, and my teeth were chattering as I fumbled with the wet clothes. I took a stiff dose of quinine to ward off any trouble. It was warm enough in reality, but after the sweltering heat of the last part of the journey I felt as though I were frozen. So I piled a second blanket on my back and sat hunched up like a native.

The chief came over with several of his wives to see that I was comfortable. By this time dusk was falling. As he vanished into the gloom lights appeared from several directions. The rain had stopped and a horrible stillness came as the wind fell. The temple—a simple palm-leaf shelter, an open room on poles—was just across the little clearing from where I sat. A priest arrived, numerous candles were lit, and groups of people came from the various jungle paths carrying torches and looking like strings of fireflies. A brass gong was sounded and a service or festival of some kind was begun.

It was while I sat listening that the storm came with meteoric suddenness. There was one terrific flash that seemed to sear my very eyeballs. There was a sudden smell of burning in the air like the smell of fireworks. Then came a crash of thunder that seemed to split the sky. The hut rocked. My head felt as though I had been sandbagged. For some moments I sat half dazed, while flash after flash followed the first one—none quite so bad, but quite bad enough. The thunder was absolutely continuous. The echoes of one crash were still rolling round the sky when a fresh crash sent more echoes rolling round to join them. The shaky little hut that formed the temple was lit up by flash after flash. The little clearing hardly fell back into darkness before another flicker lit it up from end to end. It

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was tremendous—glorious. I felt excited and exalted to an extraordinary degree. I shouted back at the storm. One of the drummers in the temple opposite must have felt the same. Amidst that group of huddled terrified natives he alone stood upright, pounding away first on one drum and then on another. Every flicker of lightning showed his white teeth flashing and his body poised, endlessly beating his drums. Perhaps he hoped to scare away the storm, even by that puny effort—but not a sound reached across the clearing above the thunder.

Then as the thunder rolled off into the distance the rain came down with a rush and a roar like thunder itself. Water and mud swirled everywhere, palm trees bowed to the ground as though pulled by invisible strings. The closely-packed bamboo thickets were seen, in the distant flashes of lightning, torn and twisted like grass and lashing backwards and forwards in fury.

Gradually the storm weakened as it went off on its way to Indo-China, till only a slight rain fell. The melancholy drip, drip from the trees continued for half the night. I lay among blankets at the head of a long procession of the chief and wives and family. Fortunately there was room to spare. If they had all had to turn when I turned they would have twisted half the night. I rolled and tossed and thought the blackest thoughts of being ill in this wild corner of the earth. Back like the stab of a dagger came thoughts of a young Austrian doctor who had taken the same route last year, and whose skeleton told part of the story of his mysterious fate. My restlessness and the heat of my temples told of a high temperature. I had to be my own doctor, and gave myself some more quinine—then started my feverish imaginings all over again. At last came oblivion.

I awoke to the squalling of brats and the groaning of the adults as they stretched their stiff bodies. The

sun was shining when I stirred. One of the mahouts came in and took out my still dripping clothes to dry them. The same girl with her five attendants brought me a breakfast of some queer-looking porridge that tasted so good that I realized that my temperature had gone. My fever-ridden imaginations of the night before vanished in a smile that brought answering grins from the almost nude chorus around me.

The elephants were still nervous from the storm. They had bellowed and trumpeted from fright, but had fortunately been unable to tear themselves loose from their fastenings. My "boys" had cheerful grins on their faces—they were glad to be under way again. I should like to have been able to converse with them and to learn their true feelings.

The steaming heat of the first hour or two soon gave way to the coolness of the lashing rains again. The path was now almost imperceptible, and only faith in the guide kept us going at all. Many times during the day the trunks of great trees, blown down by the storm, blocked further progress until the elephants got to work on them. The sharp edges of broken trees and smashed bamboos menaced us on either side. The rain lashed down for eight hours without a pause. Our camp that night was the most miserable affair imaginable. It was impossible to find a dry spot of any kind or to make a fire. I couldn't even light a cigarette. Sore and miserable, bitten by mosquitoes and covered with leeches, we pushed on again without waiting for dawn. In an endeavour to get warm I decided to walk part of the way. After I had lost my boots twice in the clinging mud, I gave it up and climbed back to my howdah. The rain still poured down unmercifully.

Out of the sea of mud we came down to the banks of a river. In the pouring rain we could not see across. I looked at the mahouts. They shrugged their shoulders. I felt the same. What a hope!

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Elephants could swim, and men could try. But it was a pretty desperate venture. The river normally was fordable. But it was swollen to two—no, three times its normal size. Not only that, but the river had spread over the banks among the trees. Along its whole course it had been busy undermining the roots of great trees on its banks and bumping them down with a splash. What with that and the aftermath of the storm, hardly a minute passed without a huge log or a collection of smaller debris rushing down the swift stream at breakneck speed capable of overwhelming and destroying anything in its path, whether elephant or man.

We tried. My elephant was urged into the water, but even before we reached the normal river bank the water was over the elephant's shoulders. There was a shout from the shore. A great log was coming straight for us at the speed of a train. Before either the mahout or myself could do anything the river-trained elephant had turned and given the log a glancing blow with its great forehead that saved a direct hit and swung the log inshore. With a grinding crash it hit a tree still standing in the flood. A tremendous splash as the huge tree was uprooted and fell within a few yards of the second elephant.

But the first blow had knocked our elephant off his feet. The mahout and I were flung into the water and swept downstream at a terrifying speed. Fortunately he was as strong a swimmer as I was, but we were a quarter of a mile down-stream before we managed to reach the bank.

A nightmare journey followed. We had to keep the river in sight or we would have soon been hopelessly lost. The rain still poured down in sheets—not that we could have been any wetter, but it made things much more uncomfortable. We could hardly see where we were going. Mud and water was up to our knees

most of the time, and up to our waists whenever the ground beneath us varied suddenly. The warmth and stickiness of the rich brown mud oozed through our fingers as we pulled ourselves along, while the cool rain washed the mud into our eyes and trickled down our necks. Several times I retrieved my boots with great difficulty, and on we went, stumbling over roots, falling, slipping and clutching at bamboos. Once I clutched a dead branch that fell to pieces in my hand, with God knows what slimy horror inside it. I suddenly became snake-conscious again, and redoubled my efforts.

Never in my life have I been so pleased to see anything as I was when the grey body of an elephant showed through the jungle. The anxious voice of the second mahout calling out was like the sweetest music. Both elephants were there safe and sound. Our only loss was the loss of half our provisions from the howdah of the first elephant, and that was not a tragedy, as we had a big margin of food.

There was nothing in the list of phrases given to me by Mr. Burns that could have expressed our mutual pleasure at the reunion. Neither was there any phrase giving the Siamese for "Retreat." I was like Napoleon's drummer-boy who had never been taught to sound the retreat. It wasn't necessary, anyway. We just turned our backs on that fearful river and started straight back. Well, we did stop long enough to get the leeches off each other, but we needed no further proofs of the impossibility of getting over that river. And we couldn't get round it.

"Oh! Hulloo, Shreve!" was the greeting from an unsurprised Burns. I was very pleased to find him back at Raheng when I arrived, even if I did feel a bit like slinking past. It hadn't been too pleasant having to turn back.

He gave directions for the mahouts and elephants

to be cared for, and then led me to the light and luxury of his bungalow.

"Guess I can't come in here," I said, with a glance at my filthy clothes, but he pushed me into a chair and called for the boy.

"Take off the boots," he commanded, "then get a hot bath ready and put out some clean clothes. And tell the cook there'll be one more master to dinner."

I was a new man when the time came to tell my story. He listened with the greatest interest. When it was time for bed he waved aside my stammered thanks and wished me "good luck" on my further journeyings. He was gone before I rose in the morning, so my gratitude to him must find its expression in this account. If he ever reads this he will know that, as I went down in the rickety launch back to Paknampoh, my heart was full of sorrow at saying good-bye for ever to such a splendid man. I should like to meet him again.

CHAPTER XX

I FIND THE MAGIC CARPET

IT was just before dawn. A crescent moon was trying hard to keep its dignity as the first rays of the sun spread across the sky. Through the deserted streets the car went at breakneck speed, taking the corners on two wheels while the tyres shrieked a protest to the native driver. Without a pause the car swept round another corner and out on to the tarmac of an aerodrome. Towering above us like a giant bird, poised ready for flight, was the "Athena," silhouetted against a background of delicate hues as the sky became bathed in golden colour. Just in time. The other passengers were already seated; then the doors were closed and the runway chocks removed. The plane turned and moved slowly down a wide concrete runway. The pilot gave her the gun. Four great engines roared. The "Athena" was off like a magic carpet. She ascended gracefully with astounding speed, circled the aerodrome and then pointed her nose to the Burmese mountains five hundred miles away.

I had found another way out.

When I had returned to Bangkok it was for my third visit. I had lost several weeks in the unsuccessful adventure over the smugglers' trail. Some way or other I had to get to Rangoon. I was ready to clutch at any straw when, spread on a poster, before my very eyes was the magic carpet—a picture of a large four-motored aeroplane flying high up above mountain and valley.

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FLY THE IMPERIAL WAY

THREE SAILINGS WEEKLY FROM THE FAR EAST TO
EUROPE

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What a joy! At last a way to Rangoon. A 'plane the next morning before dawn could take me over the mountains. A bit luxurious for a vagabond? Well, inquiries soon showed me that it would cost no more than the long journey round.

So when the hotel porter woke me long before dawn my excitement jumped me right out of bed and into the car for the aerodrome. A puncture and a change of wheels caused the hectic last-minute rush.

The sun was quite visible as the 'plane climbed into the heights. Although the aerodrome, far below, was still barely touched by the sun, we could see the sunrise, in all its glory, spread before us over the distant mountains. Although we seemed to be travelling at no more than fifteen miles an hour, a gauge over the cabin door showed that we were cruising at over one hundred and fifty miles an hour. We were five thousand feet up and flying along the course of the Mae Nam River, up which my old cargo-boat had chugged so slowly. Over the cultivated areas, paddy fields, houses and stretches of bamboo formed a fascinating mosaic. Over Paknampoh, the junction of the great rivers stood out very clearly. Within an incredibly short space of time we had covered the whole journey I had so laboriously followed.

I peered down in great excitement as I looked at the scene of my last attempt. I found it impossible, even with field-glasses, to pick out the little clearing and the village where I stayed during the storm, but the river that held us up and nearly finished us altogether was very clear. To my relief I saw that for another fifty miles the whole route was still flooded hopelessly,

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proving beyond shadow of doubt the wisdom of turning back. I couldn't say much about anything having proved the unwisdom of starting at all, but contented myself with sending good wishes down to Burns somewhere below us.

There was not a sign of habitation for miles, although the jungle abounded in game. A huge herd of wild elephants, a hundred or more, were browsing in an open space, until the roar of the 'plane scattered them. Then the foot-hills of the Tenasserim and Burma mountains seemed to be reaching up towards us. The pilot, Captain Mallard, nosed the 'plane upward. I could see the radio operator asking the ground stations for the wind currents over the ranges.

Rapidly we climbed to eleven thousand feet and into the first clouds. They appeared over the blue mountain range in a piled-up array like a great ball of cotton. Below, the valleys were filled with a sea of white, the peaks breaking out of the sea like rocks from the ocean. A huge white mass was moving against a mountain-side where the rock was sheer for a thousand feet. The mass rolled on like an invincible army, at the last moment taking an abrupt turn as if to avoid a strenuous climb. The sun shone down on an ever-changing cloud pattern that was fascinating.

Some rolling banks of cloud reached up alongside the 'plane and rolled past in a solid-looking formation. As we speeded along beside them we seemed to be travelling at a thousand miles an hour. We headed into a cloud that towered up before us in the direct path of the 'plane, as though to block our way. As we rushed towards the wall of cloud that looked for all the world like a great cliff, I shut my eyes and leant forward to brace myself for a shock, so perfect was the illusion. Immediately we were swallowed up in a fog bank so thick that it was impossible to see the wings.

A few seconds later a tremendous clap of thunder

roared round us. The 'plane lurched wildly and dropped several feet. We were over the pass where the peaks reached up from out of an average height of six thousand feet. Sudden storms and air-pockets make this one of the worst stretches of flying in the whole route to Europe.

Harder and harder blew the wind, until it reached hurricane force and drove a veritable cloud-burst at us. Captain Mallard pushed the nose of the giant machine up and up through the lightning flashes. He was fighting hard to get above the storm. The 'plane was tossed about a lot. A woman screamed. Then to everyone's relief the 'plane roared out of the storm and into sunlight again.

The pilot had won. Soon we were away from the mountains and over the sea. Down below, a great body of blue-green water was being invaded by one of golden yellow on an almost even front. They looked like soldiers drawn up to face each other in battle, each one waiting for the other to start the movement that would mingle them. The great Irrawaddy River, filled with yellow silt from Upper Burma, was emptying into the Gulf of Martaban. The clean sea appeared to resent the intrusion.

Approaching Rangoon, the tower of the magnificent golden pagoda gleamed up at us like a sun-beacon. We touched ground so gently that I was quite unable to place the actual second of impact. We had ceased to be a giant bird—the great motors were silent. I climbed down the steps and into a new country. I left the magic wings that had carried me, in four hours, over jungle and mountains and rivers, and over the same territory I might have covered, with luck, in four or five weeks.

The Immigration and Customs officers gathered round us, bringing a touch of hard-boiled realism to counteract the magic of the journey. But the magic

touch returned as we walked across to the Airport Café and found that we were still in time for a late breakfast, but much too early for lunch.

Over the bacon and eggs, I kidded Captain Mallard about hitting all the bumps.

"That was nothing," he cheerfully replied. "You should come with us when we get into some real storms. As fast as we dodge one, another comes along, and sometimes we are lost for hours."

I walked across after breakfast and saw the "Athena" and her cheerful pilot take off for Calcutta on her way to Croydon. As the great ship became a speck over the distant hills I turned back to Burma and a new venture.

News of my attempt at the Siam-Burma border-crossing and my earlier wanderings had got to Rangoon before me. I had no sooner settled in the Mantsu Mansions Hotel for one night than the *Rangoon Gazette* sent out one of its bright lads, Douglas Lackersteen by name, to write me up. Had I got through I should have been quite big news. As it was, Lackersteen's article was more about Mongolian bandits and princesses than about elephants and flooded rivers. He would persist in making it sound more like a Wild West movie, with hordes of yelling Indians, than like Mongolian bandits on camels. Regardless of my explanation, he wouldn't change his copy, but made up for it by offering me the freedom of the city. He tore around in his sports car to all the usual sights and to some of the most disreputable haunts, known only, or so he said, to bright young journalists and kindred spirits. He was a good sport—even when I wanted to see a real leper asylum he got me introductions and came with me himself, after a bit of teasing about my morbid tastes in sight-seeing.

The late Sunday afternoon sun was filtering through the branches of tall mango-trees on to rich green turf.

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The bells of a small chapel were ringing, clearly and softly, in the drowsy air. It was peace and a gentle loveliness, but we had hardly a minute to appreciate it before a huge food wagon was wheeled into the compound. Then we saw them. Eager hands clutching food bowls pushed forward. Eyes in oval brown faces became brighter as the wagon advanced. But these were not the hands and faces of ordinary men and women—they were the hands and faces of the untouchable—the outcasts—the “people God forgot.” We were in the Rangoon Leper Colony.

Three kindly white sisters made a beautiful picture as they walked across the green lawn to welcome us. We sipped a glass of wine in a cool white room while we waited for Dr. Joseph. The doctor, after twenty-nine years of looking after lepers, still retained an amazing enthusiasm for his work, and gladly shewed us what there was to be seen.

“Most people,” he said, a little sadly, “are afraid to visit us and look upon the Colony as a place of horror. You’ll see it is certainly not that,” he continued, pointing round to the lawns, the trim paths and neat buildings, and more particularly to the happy faces around. There were more than three hundred inhabitants in the little community. They maintained their own staff of cooks and tailors, gardeners and builders, clerks and teachers. All those well enough to be up and about were happy enough. The doctor pointed with pride to a small building. It was the laundry. All the machinery had been installed by the inmates themselves with no outside assistance.

“The great secret in treating leprosy,” said Dr. Joseph, “is to keep the patient busy and interested. Plenty of exercise is essential, but all lepers are filled with a disinclination to work and want to sit and brood. So we have to encourage them in every way. It takes from three to five years to effect a cure—if we get an

early start. The advanced cases are, of course, at present without hope."

"Do you use methylene blue?" I asked, airing my little knowledge of the subject.

"Not here," replied the doctor. "There have been many articles written about methylene blue and its cures, but we find that the cures are only temporary and the reactions many times worse. Often lepers discharged as cured come back worse. What we use and have used for years is Chaulmorra Oil. The oil is extracted from the seeds of the Chaulmorra tree, which abounds in Burma." He pointed to some of the trees growing in the compound itself.

One hundred of the three hundred patients were women, the youngest being a little girl of five who was skipping merrily in a corner of the lawn. The oldest was a woman who had been there for nineteen years. She was better, but not cured.

"The great difficulty is to instil enough confidence into the people to get them to come here. They think they will be prisoners, but this is not a prison."

The thought seemed to anger him.

"They are free to go when they like, but if they stay they find peace even if it is not possible to cure them."

"What are conditions like outside?" asked Douglas.

"The worst possible," was the reply. "In the villages the lepers are banished to a lonely hut. They have open space around them, but they are prisoners, for they hardly dare to move about. Their food is what their relatives can spare, and they often go thirsty. Then, destitute and despairing, riddled with the disease, they come to us—too late."

We both remarked on the great quantities of rice the lepers ate. Their bowls were heaped up. That apparently was a good sign. When their appetites flagged it was the beginning of the end.

So far we had seen little that was in any way like our

conception of a leper colony. There was another side, however, to the problem. We had only seen apparently normal people carrying on an interesting kind of life and smiling happily. Then we entered a small low-roofed house with a cement floor. Little tables were set out in the centre of the room. Around them sat the children of the colony. They were eating their rice and curry quite happily, and smiled as we entered. Yet every one was suffering from the dreaded scourge. In front of us was a little girl of twelve. She looked like a woman of forty. Even the tiny mites looked old. Dr. Joseph led the pathetic little group out into the sunshine for the photograph we had promised to take. First I took a picture with Douglas in the middle; then I knelt in the group while he took one. To the children it was fun. They thought us most amusing.

We visited the surgical ward. There were no smiles there. The patients were all advanced cases, bed-ridden and desolate, with twisted hands and missing limbs, and faces that beggared description. Yet even there the sight of Dr. Joseph brought a new light to weary eyes, and called forth ghastly grins that had to pass as smiles.

When we came out the bells were announcing the evening service—the “Mass of the Lepers.” It was a strange service. The priest in his yellow robe, the Catholic sisters in spotless white, the burning candles, and the mixture of European and native hymns. But it was the congregation—the devotion and the amazing happiness of the most hopeless assembly in the world—that held us. The “Mass of the Lepers” came to an end, and we went back to the outside world.

CHAPTER XXI

BURMESE CRADLE SONG

THEY call the Irrawaddy the "Cradle of the Burmese Race," which must have been a joke on the cheery old salt who captained the *Assam*. I hadn't been two hours on board the river steamer before I was called over to admire a brown mite which had just been born. It didn't look so wonderful to me, but the captain and the crew made quite a fuss over it. But then I was no connoisseur of babies and the captain was, or should have been. He had been doing the trip up and down the Irrawaddy river for years and years, and on every one of those eight-hundred-mile trips he had been called in as midwife to one or more of his native deck passengers. Thousands of Burmese women looked upon him as a kind of white father. It may have been because he always made the baby a present, or it may have been because there was some "kudos" or special virtue in being born on a white man's ship. I prefer to think that it was because he was such a lovable old captain and such a splendid midwife. Whatever the reason, the river steamer *Assam* was the birthplace of many hundreds of Burmese babies. A nice birthplace it was too. I enjoyed being rocked in the "Cradle of the Burmese Race" and I can add my testimony to the splendid qualities of the captain of the *Assam*.

For prosaic reasons of economy and romantic reasons of adventure I chose to go as a deck passenger with the natives. They set up a small bazaar on the flat deck. I lolled around at ease, with a thousand oppor-

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tunities of studying the care-free and unsophisticated people of Burma in an intimate way quite impossible in Rangoon. Ambition and rank have no attraction for the happy Burmese. If they get money they promptly build another of the thousands of pagodas which are such a feature of the Burmese landscape, or share their wealth round the family in an unbounded charity which is one of the secrets of their happiness.

I watched the Burmese girls smoking the "whackin' big cheroots" which Kipling has made such an inseparable part of the road to Mandalay. I was the only white passenger, so I didn't have to listen to quotations from Kipling all day long, but even then it wasn't easy to escape from him. They all seemed to take the "Road to Mandalay" very seriously, and Rudyard Kipling was the "big name" all along the route. I lay on the deck and watched the women rub a piece of thanaka bark on a round flat stone, pound it up with a little water, and paint their faces white with the resulting cream. They all carried thanaka bark and a stone with them, making the cream as required, and turning the old steamer into a floating beauty-parlour as well as a nursery.

After we had left the town of Allaanmyo, where a thousand convicted murderers were working out their fate, Captain Carnie thought I was being neglected. He invited me to be his guest for the rest of the trip. That gave me the run of the whole ship, which was great fun. It also enabled me to listen to the captain's wonderful store of gramophone records. He had a small table rigged up for me on the bridge so that I could sketch in comfort. In the evenings we stretched out in long deck chairs. The soft strains of "La Bohême" floated out across the starlit waters. On either side of us the leadsmen sounded the depths, calling out in a musical chant, "Teen—bahm—milla—nay!"—"Three fathoms and no bottom." This chant

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went on day and night—a lilting background to all my memories of that wonderful trip. The sketches I managed to do between whole-hearted bouts of dreaming idleness amused the natives. I did two of the captain which I rather liked myself. One I lost in later travels. The other, I hope, still adorns the walls of the cottage in Flintshire to which the captain said he was retiring.

Very early one morning I was awake just in time to see a Burmese “lung,” a fast-vanishing type of native craft. Its flowing lines ended in a great high stern decorated with intricate carving. It passed close along our port side. The oars flashed rhythmically in the morning sun as the boat, with its steersman seated high above the rowers, appeared out of the mist and slipped past.

Another boyhood ambition was fulfilled when I landed to see the famous ruby mines at Mogok. The son of Albert Ramsay, the famous diamond merchant, showed me round the workings. The stones are found on the surface of a hillside, so the methods employed were just as primitive as those in use hundreds of years ago. Gangs of sweating coolies sifted the dirt through screens and collected the precious stones. In the office untold wealth was spread before me against a soft background of rich black velvet.

Old King Theebaw's palace at Mandalay was a gem of another kind. It was built on piles, with wide open courts and towering teakwood pillars of red and gold. The high ceilings were gilded in tinsel splendour. The peacock throne-room with its millions of crystals and lavish gold leaf was a marvel only equalled by the Queen's apartments. I roamed from one immense room to another until, surfeited with glory, I re-crossed the great moat. It is said that the King was asleep in the palace on the night when the British and Indian soldiers crashed through the wall gate and made him a prisoner. There are many conflicting stories of that night. It is claimed that the gates were opened by a

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treacherous confederate within the walls. In any case the King had no time in which to escape through the secret tunnel he had prepared for such an emergency. The tunnel extended for miles until it connected with a little jungle trail that would have been hard to follow.

I went down into the tunnel with an eleven-year-old boy and his sister of fifteen. The boy had been following me persistently. He wanted me to buy his charming sister, but at last in desperation I suggested instead that he should act as my guide through the tunnel. They both decided to come. It was a gloomy, bat-infested passage, and lacked all the glamour that should have been associated with thoughts of escaping royalty. The two kiddies took my hands and away we went. Although the tunnel was filled in with rubbish in places, we managed, with the aid of a torch, to explore the whole length—although why we did it I don't quite know. At the end we stood on a perfectly ordinary jungle path with the very ordinary necessity of walking all the way back again. Yet I had a certain sense of achievement when I had solved my next problem. My two guides stuck to me like leeches, and evidently thought that they should hold my hands right the way through Burma. At last I had a brain-wave. I took them to a booth that sold sweetmeats and rice cakes and encouraged them to eat until their tummies swelled visibly. Within a few minutes they were fast asleep beneath a palm-tree's shade.

I wandered on alone through the tiny shops behind the homes of the carvers of jade and ivory. Some wonderful carving is done in Mandalay. I watched large blocks of unpolished jade being sawn with catgut-string on a bow. It is a slow process, requiring days to cut through a single stone. Handling the precious Chinese jade gods that were the finished product I found it easy to understand the Chinaman's love for the beautiful green stone. Also, delicately carved, were



SNAKES HAD ALWAYS FASCINATED ME

the intriguing figures in ivory—tiny things so perfectly made that their facial expressions seemed to change as I watched. Unable to afford the things I wanted, I was yet unable to resist buying a small stone, and watched, fascinated, while a silversmith set it carefully in an ornate silver ring fashioned in a design rather like one of the large sun-hats worn by the Shase girls.

My original plan was to go straight back to Rangoon from Mandalay. A chance conversation with Captain Carnie as we sat on the deck of the chugging *Assam* changed my plans. We were discussing snakes.

"If your interest in snakes," said the old captain, "is really sufficient to overcome your aversion, you should go farther north to Mount Popa. It's an extinct volcanic mountain in Upper Burma, and swarms with Hamadrayadu—the real King Cobras. The people there worship the snakes and have a strange power over them. But I warn you, the King Cobra is really dangerous and attacks on sight. It can run as fast as a horse gallops, and is big enough to strike you on the face or neck."

Nothing more was said, but when I had done all the obvious "sights" of Mandalay the possibilities of Mount Popa as something "really unusual" loomed larger. I still had the kit of serum I had brought from Indo-China. It was a great comfort, and I don't mind confessing that it was the deciding factor when it came to the point of taking a railway ticket.

It was one o'clock in the morning when a friendly train-guard knocked on the compartment door and announced our arrival at Thazi. My courage dwindled a little as I stood on a long platform and watched the train lights disappear. I was a hundred miles away from Mount Popa, instead of the forty miles I had been told in Mandalay, but I wasn't very far away from his majesty the King Cobra. As I walked along the deserted platform to the station building, wondering at the absence of any official, I came upon the usual

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group of natives seen at railway stations camped out for hours and sometimes for days waiting for the particular train they want. Something was wrong. They were gathered in an excited circle round the station staff, who were bending over a man who was lying as though dead. He had the tightly-clenched teeth typical of the victim of a cobra bite. The Hindu station-master turned as I came up. In a few words of English he told me that the man had been bitten two hours previously, and that they could do nothing. A native "healer" had been sent for and was busily engaged in the most important part of the native "treatment." He had already placed a reddish-coloured flat stone on the place where the fangs had entered, together with some herbs and charms. When I arrived he had a dead cobra in his arms which he was eating. I heard the bones crunch as he took another bite and it made me feel horribly sick for a moment. Whether the cobra he was eating was the one that had bitten the patient no one was sure, but it was an essential part of the treatment for him to eat part at least of a snake—for preference the one that had done the damage.

With the help of the station-master and his staff I pushed back the anxious relatives and friends and sent a man running to the end of the platform for my duffle. I had remembered the serum. It was obvious that the man would very soon be dead if left to the primitive superstitious ministrations of the repulsive old healer, who still hovered near, muttering protests at my interference. I bent over the victim. Someone held a match while I sterilized the hypodermic needle, then I cautiously injected a shot of serum. Within ten minutes the clenched teeth were released and the man was sitting up talking to his friends as they carried him away with a very good chance of recovery. Soon, only the station-master and a few scattered natives were left on the platform.

The station-master took me into the telegraph-room for a chat. His name was George Barnard, and he was very interested in my proposed trip to Mount Popa, offering to provide a car for the journey. There was quite a good road out to the mountain and beyond to the Government oilfields by the Irrawaddy River. Barnard thought that for safety I should carry a gun and offered to lend me a double-barrelled shot-gun, a bit antiquated, but quite effective—an offer which I accepted with gratitude. There were still a few hours of darkness left, and I was glad of a nap on a canvas cot in the waiting-room.

As the dawn became cool grey light I was aroused by the honking of the horn of a car which was waiting for me. Soon we were hurrying along the road to Mount Popa. My chauffeur did not speak a word of English, and in any case was too busy keeping the car on the road between his yawns. We passed two jungle villages just coming to life for the new day. We passed barking dogs and staring natives in a rush, only stopping now and again to move a domestic water-buffalo which ignored the car-horn in its own placid way. Whenever we reached an open space Mount Popa could be seen towering three thousand feet above the green jungle-roof like a guardian sentinel.

At high noon we approached the sleepy little village of Mount Popa. Except that the usual prayer post was carved with the body of "Naga the Cobra" instead of the more conventional Burmese designs, the village was typical of all the bamboo and palm-thatched villages we had passed. Three long community houses came into view, then a varied assortment of dirty individual huts, the space under each crowded with cattle, pigs and mangy dogs. At first I feared that it would prove to be no more interesting or exciting than any of the other villages, but as soon as the people appeared they proved to be a mixture of Hindu and Burmese

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blood, and quite distinct from the ordinary Burmese villagers. They did not exactly welcome me with open arms, but I refused to be put off by that. They were all busy at work, which was in itself sufficiently unusual to call for investigation. The explanation was a simple one. They were making rice wine for the winter supply and were working with a will. The rice was fermenting in hollow bamboo logs about four feet long. As each was ready the contents were poured into a large shallow wooden vessel, hot water added, and the final mixture poured into other bamboo logs to be stored underground until required.

Several of the natives spoke English, having been away on tours abroad to demonstrate their amazing powers over the King Cobra. There are many charmers of the ordinary cobra in the East, but these villagers were the only people in the world who could charm the King Cobra. Many of the dancers and charmers were even then on a tour of Europe, but they promised to put on a "dance" for my benefit, and promised to bring in two large King Cobras that live in their natural wild state in the jungle near by. They became much more amiable when they realized my interest in their peculiar art, and really friendly when I offered to pay for their services.

A youngster named Ting, about twelve years of age, wanted to be my guide and to show me the sacred pagoda on the very summit of Mount Popa, where all the worshippers go once every year to give thanks to their serpent god "Naga." There were several hours of daylight left, so I left my things in the Government bungalow, built for the use of white men travelling to the oil wells, and Ting and I took the narrow trail up the mountain-side. He told me that the sacred pagoda was guarded by an immense "hamadrayadu," or King Cobra, but that it could only be seen by those who go to worship, and not by chance visitors. The winding

path was an easy climb, as even the old people must make their way to the top once a year, even if they have to be carried there. Bamboo steps are provided at all the difficult places. The path became very interesting as we gained height. As we climbed the last knoll on the crater rim the pagoda came into sight, dazzling white in the afternoon sun. The guardian serpent had not shown itself, although numerous creeping vines on the way up had offered excellent cover and had given me one or two moments of excitement.

"Ting," I exclaimed, "I want to see a live 'hamadrayadu' in his native haunts."

"To-morrow, monsieur, I will show you one or more besides the ones used in the dance to-night."

I asked him why his people worshipped the cobra.

"Many years ago," he told me, "the son of the great god Vishnu came to Mount Popa, causing the eruption, then remained and married a cobra. They had many children, who were so much larger and wiser than the ordinary cobras that they became known as King Cobras, and made their home round this mountain for ever more."

We got back to the village just before sundown in time to see that a ring had been scratched in the dirt in the centre of the village, under the spreading branches of a great banyan tree, ready for the dance. It was about seven o'clock as darkness enveloped the whole jungle, making the small lights of the huts gleam like jewels in a dark velvet case. A varied assortment of drums were brought out and the drummers took their places round the tree. Some of the drums, made from hollow bamboo logs, were eight or nine feet long.

At last all was ready. The drums began a monotonous throbbing, working up to a crescendo of crashing sound, then trailing off amid echoes that seemed to come down from the upper branches of the great banyan tree. A moment later the circle was filled with flaming torches—simple things made of aromatic resins wrapped in

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dried palm leaves—borne in the hands of naked little bright-eyed boys. The torch-boys took up their places round the edge of the circle, forming a hedge of flame. From the back of the circle came the dancers with two immense King Cobras, each carried by three men. The freshly-oiled bodies of the men were almost nude and were smeared with marks of yellow clay. Behind them came three women, two with beautiful shining bodies, nude except for silver anklets, and the third an old woman who wore many clothes and carried a great stick.

The drums pounded on and on. Native flutes accompanied them with unearthly melodies. Excitement rose to fever pitch. The dancers, probably well under the influence of rice spirits, swung and swayed like demons swinging the great snakes, first above their heads, then almost down to the ground. The cobras, too, seemed completely hypnotized. The women danced in a frenzy, posturing with their arms in serpent fashion, twisting and turning their shining bodies in the wildest contortions. Suddenly both cobras were placed in the centre of the ring and turned loose. Instantly they coiled like a steel spring and reared up over the heads of the dancers, swaying with them. Their great hoods were spread wide, their wicked tongues darted in and out continually. The dancers whirled around and around them.

To my horror one of the girls approached each cobra, catching them round the body just below the hood. They drew the terrible heads down and kissed the snakes. My heart skipped a beat or two as I watched. I had been told that outside the ring I was perfectly safe, but I wondered what I should do if one of the brutes started my way. They run with the speed of a galloping horse, and I noticed that several times during the dance they seemed to be eyeing me with a cold, glassy stare that was disconcerting. The drums rose again to a thundering volume that beat on the senses

BURMESE CRADLE SONG

and left them numb. The old woman was pounding madly on the ground with her great stick and squawking with a hideous red mouth dripping with betel-nut. The torch-boys squatted low, keeping the ring of fire intact, the flames shining on madly whirling bodies and illuminating as strange a scene as any traveller could ever hope to see.

With a sobbing throb the music crashed to a finish. The dance was over. The dancers dispersed into the outer ring of darkness, taking their "gods" with them, much to my relief. I pinched myself to be sure that this had really happened. The villagers who made up the outer ring of spectators faded away into the night. Even to them the dance of the serpents has an element of mystery and awe. My little guide of the day approached, still carrying his torch and clad only in a gee string. He offered to escort "monsieur" to the bungalow, which I had forgotten existed. When we reached the end of the little trail he turned back and I went up the steps alone.

The Burmese chauffeur was lying on the floor rather more than sound asleep from the effects of rice spirit. An old Chinese caretaker, who spoke English with an American accent, appeared and guided me to my room. The dilapidated bungalow was damp and mysterious and most uninviting. When the old Chinaman warned me to let the lantern he gave me burn all night, in case a cobra entered, it seemed even more unattractive. The place was infested with cobras, and the building, being quite open, was easily entered.

To make matters worse, the Chinaman, rather relishing a chance to make my blood curdle, told me in sibilant whispers a story of the last white man who stayed at the bungalow. Arriving in the late afternoon, after a long ride, he had dragged a long cane sleeper-chair out on to the veranda and had thrown himself down for a nap. He was suddenly awakened from his doze to

become aware of something moving beneath his chair. His first thought was that it was a rat or a lizard.

But no ! A queer hissing sound was plainly audible. He was afraid to move, but lay motionless, hardly daring to breathe. The chances were a hundred to one that a hamadrayadu was underneath his chair. He knew well the evil disposition and deadly power of the most dangerous snake in Burma. His automatic was out of reach, even if he could move without being bitten first. While lying thus for what seemed an eternity he heard the sound of bare feet approaching, probably his personal servant. The footsteps came closer—they halted at the foot of the steps. A loud hiss came from the floor. There was a muffled exclamation, as though of annoyance. Then an unfamiliar voice spoke quietly and urgently . . . "Cheep, cheep, cheep, cheep . . . Hey, Bogyi, Lagu, Hey, Come Bogyi !" just as one would call a disobedient puppy. There was a rustle under the chair, and something long and heavy was dragged across the floor. Following the sound until he thought the brute had gone, he turned his head to look. A strange Burmese man was standing outside opposite the steps. Disappearing over the edge of the veranda were the last eleven or twelve feet of an enormous King Cobra, its black and yellow body shining and glossy. It slid out of sight as he watched, and moved by the feet of the Burman, whose eyes were on the reptile. By all the laws governing the habits of cobras, it should have reared up savagely with outspread hood and attacked the man. Instead, it went at his call and hurried away as fast as it could.

The white man called to the Burman in his native tongue. He was an elderly man dressed as the usual villager, and approached with a smile. When asked why the cobra did not attack him he replied : "Oh, that's Bogyi Hahim. You were in great danger truly, monsieur, but attack me ?" he laughed. "I know Bogyi long time."

BURMESE CRADLE SONG

"Does he live in the village?" asked the Englishman.

"Oh, no, back among the rocks mostly," said the native.

"Then," concluded the old Chinaman, who had described the whole scene very vividly, "the native shut tight. Nothing would make him say more."

Yet for all his story-telling and the excitement of the evening, I fell asleep, and only woke up to the sunrise. Except for some squawking and chattering from the jungle and a few monkeys that looked in through the open window, all was quiet and peaceful as I ate a breakfast of curry and rice. My little friend Ting was curled up on the veranda steps waiting for me, and soon we were walking along a narrow trail that led round the base of the mountain. I had taken my gun, just in case, because I wanted to see the King Cobra in his native haunts. Three or four times we paused at spots where, Ting averred, one or more snakes lived. He called them by name, but none appeared, although we saw several smaller cobras. One crawled across the trail in front of us in a very leisurely fashion, not even giving us a glance.

The day developed quickly into one of burning heat wherever the trail widened sufficiently to let the sun break through, while underneath the green archway of the narrow path it was steaming. At high noon, hungry and thirsty, and far from the village, we came to a lone thatched hut in a clearing. The natives squatting beneath a palm-shaded open veranda made us welcome and provided tea and rice. I climbed up the bamboo ladder into the shade of the veranda. Coming out of the brilliant sunshine, I could see very little in the semi-darkness of the hut at first. Then a movement made me look up. I almost tumbled over the low balcony as I saw a wicked flat head reaching down towards me from the thick bamboo rafters. A large python, his spotted body now clearly visible, made me reach swiftly

for my gun. I knew that I could get him before he uncoiled, but the natives grabbed me tight and took the gun. Then they explained. The python was their friend and guardian of their hut and had been for years. Even the babies running round, who would have made an excellent meal for a python, were safe. The python slept in the roof by day and crawled over their sleeping bodies at night as it prowled round, keeping all animals and rodents away. However, I preferred to sit on the other side of the hut. The python was aware of a strange presence and still lowered his head to investigate. Gulping down my tea, I thanked the people and pushed on again along the trail, leaving the strange pet to those who liked his company.

The afternoon slid by with still no sign of a King Cobra. We were working round in a circle back to the village. The worst heat of the sun had gone as we crossed an area of grass and shrubs, used as pasturage for the villagers' buffaloes. Ting and I were walking abreast, and he told me of his life in the jungle and of how he learned to speak English. I was carrying the gun which swung loosely in my hand, and I had almost given up hope of seeing a hamadrayadu, when it happened. Not unlike a toy snake springing up in its box, a great King Cobra reared up some seven feet or so from the grass. The black pointed head, with its tremendous hood, swayed, like a fan in the breeze, revealing a glistening tongue and venomous fangs. All the wickedness of the ages seemed to be concentrated in that swaying, hissing form. The suddenness of the cobra's appearance froze me in my tracks. Then, only realizing that the King Cobra takes the offensive without provocation, I raised my gun to my shoulder and fired. I hit the brute just under the hood, nearly severing the head. Even then there was nearly ten minutes of convulsive thrashing before I could approach, keeping a sharp look-out for any other snakes.

Ting meanwhile was more excited than I was, but for a different reason. I had killed one of his people's gods, and that was serious. Even as we stretched the body out to its full eighteen feet and examined its inch-long fangs, he protested that although he did not know that cobra by name he could have gone up to it. His obvious seriousness was uncanny, and made me wonder what would really have happened if I hadn't fired. The huge reptile had been less than twenty feet away and was certainly not greeting us as boyhood friends. Despite Ting's protests I preferred to be associated with the King Cobra in his final state, without regard to any domestic qualities he might possess.

Having killed the cobra and, realizing the impossibility of hiding the "body" or covering up the fact that I had shot one of the gods, I determined to put a bold face on it and at least secure the skin as a trophy. So, disregarding Ting's concern, I rigged a rope of vines round the body and dragged it back to the village. Ting's anxiety and sorrow was nothing compared to the scene when we arrived trailing the dead "hamadrayadu." For a time I wondered if their fear of doing violence to a white man would really be outweighed by other considerations. Such a crowd collected, with such shouting and threats and curses, that I had to turn the gun on them and threaten in my turn, although I was fully conscious of the pathos of the scene as the villagers of both sexes blessed and fondled the dead snake. Any hope of the skin as a trophy had to be abandoned. I walked back to the bungalow alone, an outcast, even Ting having deserted me. I had committed the unforgivable crime.

As darkness came down, the bungalow seemed gloomier than ever. I deeply regretted the necessity of spending another night in that miserable place, but to go out on the jungle road by night was impossible. The villagers lit a large fire beneath the banyan tree

where the previous night's dance had been held. From the veranda steps as I sat, lonely and outcast, I could hear the throbbing of the drums. The maddening beat rose in accusing waves of sound. At last I got up, while the air still vibrated with menacing sound, and, making my driver understand that we would leave at dawn, I secured a light from the old Chinaman and went to bed. I placed my gun in a handy position and fell asleep after the drums ceased, but only to jump up again in fright each time I lost consciousness.

The first promise of dawn found me rousing my chauffeur. Half asleep, we crossed the lawn to the front gate of the compound, the driver walking ahead. The path was narrow through the unkempt grass and weeds. Suddenly I felt a sting on my left leg. Jumping sideways, I looked down to see a small black cobra hanging on to my leg. It was a horrible moment. I quickly knocked him off with the gun barrel and crushed the brute with the gun stock. Fortunately I did not try to shoot him or I should have aroused the whole village.

The driver rushed to my rescue and we hurriedly carried my bags back to the bungalow to secure the serum. The Chinaman brought us boiling water to sterilize the hypodermic needle. It seemed ages before I succeeded in getting the needle under the skin of the stomach side wall and injecting a complete dose. After previous experiences I knew the serum was dependable and that only a few minutes had elapsed since I was bitten. Yet I must admit that my hand was trembling a bit from excitement. If the cobra had eaten recently the bite was not serious. In swallowing an object requiring effort the poison sacs are emptied, the primary purpose of the poison being to paralyse the living meal on its way to be digested. Even if the snake had bitten anything fairly recently the danger was small, but this could not be determined without examination, so we

cut open the black cobra to see. We found no recent food, so I decided to take another twenty c.c. of the serum. This time I inserted the needle beside the place where the fangs had entered—just below the calf of my leg. My linen trousers, over the spot where I had been “stung,” were wet, showing that some of the poison had been absorbed. As activity was essential for recovery, and since I felt no pain, I started to walk around to relieve my spirits.

I was thankful that only the three of us knew of the bite. If the villagers learnt of it they would undoubtedly attribute it to their “curse” and the vengeance of their god. Yet it still remained a mystery. Why should the barefooted Burmese driver have escaped the cobra when he passed only a second before me? Why, after all the cobras I had encountered, should I get bitten just as I was leaving and when I was not wearing my high boots, thinking they were no longer necessary? Was the cobra deliberately concealed in my path, or was it just an accident? The natives, of course, knew nothing of the serum I had in my duffle—the white man’s magic. It was two long hours before I could count myself as really out of danger.

The morning activities were in full swing as I carefully crossed the compound again. I tossed my duffle into the car and gave the old caretaker an extra rupee or two to keep him quiet about it all. Then back we headed for the railroad and civilization. I shook the dust of Mount Popa village from my shoes, while I have no doubt the villagers were glad to see the dust of my car. At every turn on our road the dignified and majestic height of Mount Popa itself looked down on the puny mortals fleeing below. The giant “hamadryads,” the gods of that beautiful mountain, hid themselves in the long grass and in their lonely caves until a more faithful worshipper called them from their holes again.

CHAPTER XXII

INDIAN LYRIC

RANGOON again and Douglas Lachersteen waiting to meet me with a big "Hullo, Marco Polo!"

"I hope you have some good Burmese adventures for us," he said, as he neatly steered his roadster between two bullock-carts and chased me off for a bath and a meal. Over coffee I told him of the Mount Popa adventure.

"That's a good story, Doug," I added, "and you'll have to pay me for that one if you want it."

So off we went to see the editor. Mr. Lynch promised to feature the story in the *Gazette* and asked for pictures. A boy was sent out to borrow a shot gun, and they took several pictures of me in various attitudes. It was all very amusing and very helpful financially. Then, with only a few hours to spare before the sailing of the British Indies liner that was to take me to Calcutta, Douglas and I roamed the town. It was nice to have someone to wave to as the boat sailed, and I promised to write more for the *Gazette* whenever I had anything interesting to report.

There were few passengers and most of them were on their way back to England. A young English attorney of Calcutta, named Hugh Kitchen, was very friendly, and we soon found a common interest in big-game shooting and swapped stories by the hour.

We were leaning over the rail of an upper deck one evening just after dinner. The sea was running in long swells and there was considerable motion on the boat—at least, it was considerable for a boat of that size. Suddenly there was a sharp call from the bridge: "Man overboard!" The forward deck was all excitement as

men rushed to the starboard side. A native had fallen, jumped, or had been pushed overboard. We could see him in the water swimming with the strength lent by terror. Three lifebuoys, two of them with flares, were hurled after him, and the calm voice of an officer on the bridge gave the order "Hard to port." As the swimmer neared the stern it swung away from him. The wash of the rudder pushed him away from the death suction of the propeller, but he was swept past into the wake of the ship and into the darkness beyond. A bell rang below and the engines were reversed, but the ship, having no hydraulic brakes, had to be brought to a stop with care or havoc would have resulted below. It seemed an age before we could make a circle and come round again to where the unfortunate native should be.

A boat was lowered, but the launching took some time—the heavy swells made it extremely difficult. At last the boat appeared, pitching and bobbing past the stern. From our comfortable view-point it seemed that the men and the officer in charge were taking things very easily, but few people realize the weight of a lifeboat and the difficulty of handling it in a heavy sea. We could see the boat circling the two lifebuoys with flares which had drifted some distance apart, but they did not seem to be able to find the man. The time that had passed seemed an eternity. Voices among the spectators were beginning to murmur, "They can't find him."

A lady near me dropped the blasé pose which had distinguished her on the voyage. She gripped my arm in her excitement. "But I saw him grasp the flareless lifebelt," she muttered. "He may have dropped off from sheer exhaustion. Perhaps the sharks have got him."

A shudder went through the watching passengers. It was almost completely dark. The little light on the boat could be seen moving to and fro. The rescuers could be seen silhouetted on the crest of a wave as the

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boat eclipsed one of the flares, but still without success. From the ship's bridge came streams of whirling light which left trailers of a million sparks, as the captain ordered rocket flares to light up the sky and waters. They sailed up in a great oval sweep, reached a peak, broke into balls of flashing light suspended in mid-air, then slowly dropped, illuminating the dark waters. As the darkness was banished for a few seconds, the rescue boat dashed off in another direction and suddenly stopped, and we knew they had found him.

Sighs of relief swept over the anxious group huddled along the rail. The lifeboat was heading back for the ship. She came alongside, the heavy oars flashing in the light. As we peered down we could see the victim squatting in the bottom of the boat between the fresh-water kegs, but there were more thrills to come. The boat and the crew were in danger. The heavy swell was making matters very difficult. It was almost impossible for the men to keep the bottom blocks hooked on to the boat. The officer dashed backwards and forwards with amazing agility helping to fix the blocks, but each time the swell defeated his efforts. A splintering crash brought everyone's heart into their mouth. It was only a thwart that had been smashed, but it sounded as though the boat had been stoved in. For a moment the stern hung in the air, the bow almost under water. The next wave would have smashed it to atoms. The officer, at the risk of a crushed hand, succeeded in fastening the blocks. Slowly the boat was raised by the derricks. It could not be lifted quickly enough to avoid the next wave entirely, and it crashed against the bottom of the boat. By inches they escaped capsizing. Slowly the boat rose until willing hands could take the shivering native to the comfort of warm blankets, and the tired crew could climb out. As the passengers trooped down to the saloon with a subject for conversation, the engine-room bell rang, the

propellers turned, and we were under way again. Hugh and I continued to lean on the rail, discussing the romantic country which was only a few hours' sailing ahead—the enchanted land of India.

I didn't stay long in Calcutta. It was sticky and hot and at first sight a very busy modern city. I was grateful to Hugh for an introduction to a country club and enjoyed a cooling swim more than I had ever enjoyed a swim before. I went all Anglo-Indian and played golf on a very nice course, and sat down to tea on a lawn of which the members were justly proud. A boy with a red flag on a long bamboo pole stood on the edge of the lawn in front of the Club-house. Hugh saw me looking, and explained that it was the boy's job to wave the flag to prevent the kites—cheeky birds—from swooping down in flocks on to the tea-tables.

Next morning I woke from a very hard bed in a huge hotel bedroom to find an inquisitive mosquito buzzing round my mosquito net, trying to sample the new arrival. A couple of kites swooped down on to the tram-lines outside my window and squabbled over some garbage. The day was spent shopping and driving round Calcutta. Lunch at one club—tea at another—then Hugh took me out to the old Fort William of "Black Hole" fame. It wasn't a pleasant spot when my imagination got to work. The old fort was still used, and its guns were kept in readiness. On the way back we passed a Moslem burial ground where a miracle man, surrounded by a large crowd, was undertaking to restore to life a woman who died of a snake-bite six weeks before. With living snakes round his neck he worked frantically over the exhumed body claiming that the body of a person dying of snake-bite remained perfectly preserved for six months, during which time it could be resurrected. In the end he had to admit that the "auspicious hour had passed," much to the disgust

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of the crowd. As we left a free-for-all mud fight was taking place over the gruesome remains.

That night Hugh told me that the Durga Poojah festival at Pori was just beginning—the greatest Hindu festival in all India, attracting more than a million pilgrims. I made all arrangements to leave for Khurja that night by train, and telegraphed for a car to be waiting for me for the last forty miles, which had to be travelled by road. What a road it was, too, when I eventually arrived! The sun was blazing down. Along the broad road, ankle-deep in dust, crawled a motley pageantry of devotees, white-robed and white-turbaned, trudging the weary miles. Yet the air echoed with joyful shouts as each mile brought them nearer their heart's desire. The debts they had incurred, the families they had left, all their trials and all the tribulations of the road faded into complete insignificance as they neared their goal. One old, old man was performing probably the last penance of his troubled life. He measured every inch of the road, stretching full length in the dust. Forward and down in the dust again—forward and down in the dust—interminably. He had already been three months on the road.

Lining the roadside were the casualties, unheeded and uncared for. Some were past caring for, as evidenced by the scuttling of jackals, and the slow heavy flight of interrupted vultures as we went along in a cloud of dust. It was just a phase of the pilgrimage to Jagannath. Hail to Siva, Supreme Ruler of the World. The pilgrimage went on. Soon the road was so crowded that we went only at a snail's pace until, as darkness fell, the little fires were lit along the sacred road to Pori, and the pilgrims camped for the night, leaving the road to us. At dawn next morning I was gazing down from the heights where the great temple of Jagannath stood. In the distance was a glorious sunrise and the blue hills. In the centre the great tower of Jagannath shot

up to a dizzy height. Lesser towers stood around us as though in attendance. From the sun pillar which stood in front of the main entrance the procession of men would start, pulling the great car to the beach and then to the Garden Temple a mile to the East. That, however, was for the next day. The first day was devoted to some spectacular individual penances that I was particularly anxious to see. To this end I did the only thing possible which would enable me to get into the temple grounds. I donned Hindu robes, smeared the exposed part of my body with burnt cork and dung ashes, completing the disguise with a vermilion caste mark on my forehead.

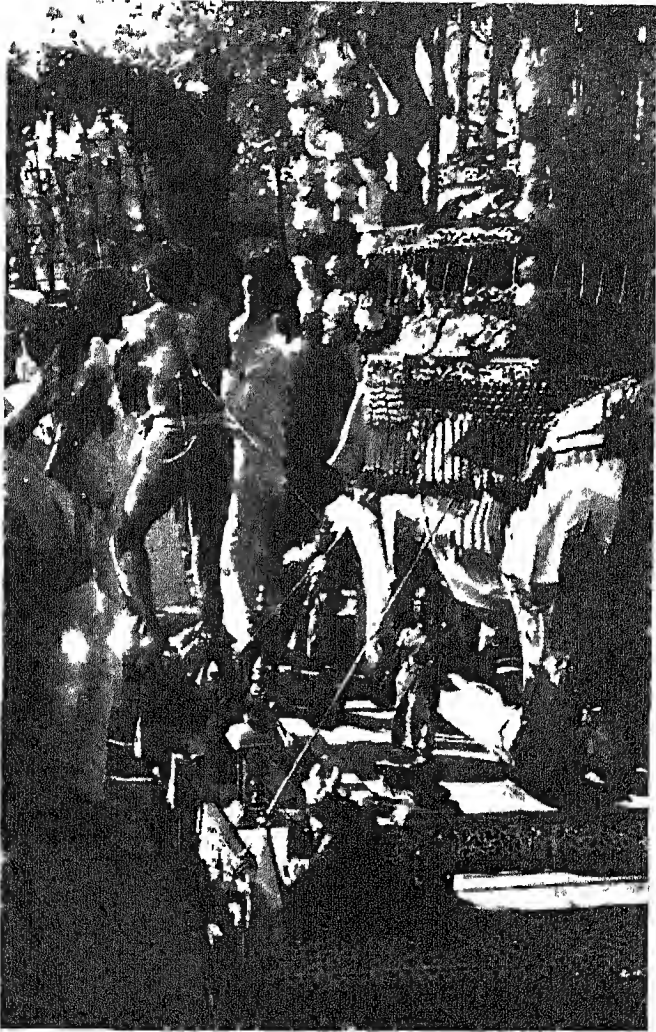
I managed to slip through the temple gate with a group of the relatives and friends accompanying the first victims of the ordeal. After washing their feet they stood before an image and mumbled their prayers. Then we all went round behind a small temple to an open courtyard where the priests waited. The devotees were stripped to a loincloth, then smeared with white dung-ash from the sacred cows. When all were prepared in a similar manner they were led forward, one by one, amid the chanting of the priests. A large "cage" of thin steel was put over the shoulders of the first man. A metal band which passed round his waist supported several hoops of steel, and the whole contraption was strapped to the body. The priest then pinched the flesh of the man's right cheek and thrust a silver dart right through until it protruded on either side for several inches. Nothing daunted, the man put out his tongue. A longer dart was pushed into the upper lip, through the tongue and out through the lower lip. Then a whole bundle of sharp spikes, some three feet long, were handed to the priest, who, after all this, began to look more like a chief torturer than a priest. The spikes were placed through the framework of the attachment the man wore, so that each

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sharp point stuck into the flesh. It was not until nearly a hundred spikes had been stuck into this living pin-cushion that I realized the astounding fact that not a single drop of blood had been spilt. There was no shadow of doubt that the points had entered the man's flesh. I was too near to be mistaken; yet not a drop of blood was spilt, and through it all the man did not flinch, but only moved his body occasionally to assist the priest in his gruesome task. More needles were brought and then hooks were fastened in the living flesh—hooks on which brass pots and bottles of holy water were hung. Finally and incredibly the man donned the shoes for his four-mile walk in the burning sun—wooden sandals lined with hundreds of sharp-pointed nails.

A small group of priests were preparing another devotee who intended to pull the Kayadi, a small car with a sacred peacock of solid gold on the top shrine. I incautiously pushed my way in to get a closer view. Without warning a group of priests rushed at me. My disguise was not good enough. I was "run out" of the temple courtyard and pitched out into the swelling mob outside with amazing celerity and efficiency. I refused to be put off quite as easily as I had been put out. An opportunity occurred a few minutes later, when a large crowd pushed through the gate with me safely in the centre. I took the hint, however, and kept well away from the priests. From a vantage point on some steps I watched the rest of the preparations. The second man had been dealt with much as the first had been. In addition, as I watched again, two great hooks were fastened in his naked flesh, stuck right through the muscles of his lower back. To the hooks were fastened the ropes which pulled the Kayadi.

At last all was ready. Five men were ushered out of the courtyard on to the road. Three were pulling kayadi, the carts containing the peacock-crowned shrine,



THOSE WICKED HOOKS WERE FIRMLY PLANTED INTO
LIVING FLESH

two were mere pincushions of pain. The religious fervour had gone up to fever heat. Frenzied people were rushing in all directions, drums were throbbing and the whole mob was chanting. The tortuous journey began. Facing the danger of being discovered again when the religious fervour was so much higher that the risk I ran was considerable, I pushed forward. It meant fighting every inch of the way, but at last I got really close to one of the men pulling a sacred cart. My eyes had not deceived me. There was no possible doubt. Those wicked hooks and silver darts were firmly planted into living flesh, yet not one drop of blood could be seen. The penances were self-imposed even though the priests performed the actual operation. They may have been pledged at the time of a plague or in order to free a whole family from sin. I was unable to see the sufferers at the end of their journey or to see the removal of the terrible instruments of torture, but I saw enough to be certain that whatever desire or hope had inspired their penance, they fully earned their reward.

Long before sunrise next day a stream of devotees poured into the courtyard, and multitudes of eager faces turned to the East to greet the rising sun. They had already immersed their bodies in the holy water, and were crowded round the sun pillar waiting for the great moment. Five or six hundred at a time could pull the ponderous car. All hoped to take a part as that act alone might bring redemption. As the hour of dawn approached the gods were brought out of the temple and placed on the car. At last the car itself was undraped. Huge brass trumpets were blown. The size of the ponderous-moving shrine astonished me. It towered more than fifty feet in the air, and was mounted on sixteen solid wooden wheels studded with huge brass nails set off with many jewels. The priests sang hymns before the temple to inform Jagannath of the

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risen sun. Removing the divan on which the god was supposed to have slept the night, they burnt camphor in silver vessels, lit torches and then served the idol his "vhota hazri," consisting of rice and sweetmeats. The most sacred god, Jagannath himself, was then brought out and hoisted to the very topmost platform of the car.

My first view of this Lord of the Universe, the most idolized god of India, was most disappointing. Hanging by ropes and being hauled, helpless and twisting, into his place, he was too obviously a wooden idol. Later, however, I had time to admire the rich brocades, the lovely peacock feathers and the wealth of jewellery that adorned him. When, seated in all his pomp and pageantry, with a priest on either side of his throne waving a yak-tail switch to keep off the flies, with his hundreds of dancing girls in excited attendance, and with his hundred of thousands of fervid followers in worshipful reverence, he made a more impressive picture.

I crowded to the front to get near enough to touch the sweating bodies of those who were hauling on the ropes, but it required superhuman strength to remain near the car for long. The great car, the Juggernaut of India, went on in a mighty rush. A million throats took up the cry "Jagannath Ka-Sai!" until it echoed and re-echoed down the wide avenue of Bara-Dana. The priests on their platform received a shower of rice and fruit, money and jewellery, gifts to the god, and banged their gongs in acknowledgment. Scores of people threw themselves between the great wheels, but found refuge in the space beneath—a symbolical suicide that had to take the place of the thousands of deaths the Juggernaut used to cause before the British discouraged the practice. Many still die despite the vigilance of the priests, but they were few compared with the number who perished in ancient days. So the great god rode on in his car, with his huge eyes

pointing towards the sacred river. The diamond in his forehead shone out over the straining, struggling thousands below. I stood back and watched and wondered, thankful that I had been able to get to Pori in time to see the greatest religious festival in wonderful India.

I stayed on for several days. Even though the main ceremony was over, the pilgrims still swarmed in the city and beyond. I became a pilgrim, too, and my amazement and wonder had full scope. I saw the fire-walkers at their extraordinary penances, walking on red-hot stones with apparent immunity. I saw fat priests sitting by the side of the great umbrellas that covered tiny shrines where the poor pilgrims paid out their hard-earned annas for garlands to lay on the images. I saw the incredible "fakirs," the holy men of India, hanging suspended over slow fires, lying on beds of spikes, being buried for hours in the ground, and I saw, with unimpaired curiosity, most of the strange manifestations which are part of India, but which have been described and explained a hundred times before. I tested some of the fakirs myself—trampling on the newly-dug grave in which men had just buried one of these "holy" men in my presence. An hour later I helped to release the entombed man, who was soon alive again. One man, who *may* have been a trickster, passed every test that I could conceive. He was eating glass with apparent relish when I saw him. Dressed only in a filthy loin-cloth and with his matted hair plastered down with mud, he was a repulsive sight. He was preaching that all physical harm is in the mind alone and that no poison or any such things could harm him. After crunching up a few bottles and glasses, he allowed a cobra to bite him. It may have been a recently fed snake or one with the fangs extracted, but the small bottle of carbolic acid in my haversack was no fake, and he knew it. He had asked for more poison—any poison—and swallowed the contents of

that bottle on my invitation with every appearance of comfort, if not enjoyment, and certainly with no apparent harm. The neat acid would have burnt the skin off an elephant, but it had no effect on the old fakir. Every corner and every street in Pori had one or more of these old men with their attendant disciples. Some were horribly mutilated, but all were unprepossessing—smeared in white dung-ash and with matted hair and filthy breech-clouts. From time immemorial India has held such men sacred and emperors have been proud to kneel in the dust before them. The naked dung-smeared figures, dependent on the charity of the very poorest, were yet acclaimed greater than kings.

Grouped round a fire by one of the courtyard bells were a number of people from one of the rural sections. A teacher moved round within the circle. They were chanting the "Mantras" or holy sayings over and over again. The priest looked up as I approached. The temple god on a raised shrine was completely hidden by the people asking blessings. As soon as the priest saw a "white sahib," he pushed back the worshippers most rudely so that I might have a view of the flower-draped image. For this I gave them two annas (five cents). They laughed loudly and happily and said, "Very poor white man!" I laughed, too, and moved on, pleased to find the priest and his flock so human after the inhuman and incredible sights all around.

It was a reminder, too, of the difficulty of living cheaply as a "white sahib" in India. After the excitement of Pori I jibbed at another week of the same sort of thing at Benares, and was not at all anxious to return to Calcutta. So I was very pleased to receive an invitation to spend a week in the wilds of Hindustan. To reach my destination I had several hundred miles to go, and was faced with a serious problem of transport. Even second-class was too extravagant. I was quite willing to go third-class with the natives, but first of

all I could not get any ticket-man to take me seriously, and secondly I was to be met at Nagpur by my host and couldn't "let the side down" too badly. In the end I just marched boldly into the first-class and managed to bribe the native conductor to leave me in peace.

My invitation was the vague kind of thing current in Anglo-Indian circles. "Give my love to the D.C. in Hyder if you meet him, and don't forget that the F.O. in Noaghera is a friend of mine." I took a chance on the F.O. and sent a wire. Back came a cheerful reply, and my welcome was kingly. The Forest Officer met me himself and whisked me away to the tiny hill-station where he ruled in state. He was lord of everything he surveyed—what a view it was, too! We left the car, after climbing for miles and miles, and looked back across the plain for more than forty miles over jungle and teak forest and over dark ravines where tigers and panthers lived almost undisturbed. I had always wanted to go "jungli"—here was a wonderful chance. The sky was blue and the beautiful blossom of the jocaranda trees were deep purple. The modesty of my host left me to guess at the real importance of his job. It was not until I returned to civilization that I found out that he had complete charge of a thousand miles of country, hills and valleys, forests and plains.

The first morning we set off very early on a tour of inspection. The F.O. in that remote district was game warden as well as doctor and judge, policeman and soldier. To my unconcealed joy there were four rifles in the car, three in a rack at the back and one was resting by my host's hand with the barrel poking out of the space where the wind-screen was hinged down to let us feel the cooling air. The butt rested on the seat between us.

"You're not nervous of the gun, I hope?" he asked politely, with a sly twinkle in his eye. I had been wished on him, and he knew only that I was an artist

and a traveller who was a friend of a friend of his. The possibilities of that combination has, I fear, rather frightened him, and his welcome so far was a mark of his relief that I wasn't as bad as I might have been. He had deliberately misread my longing glance at that gun.

"Er . . . no!" I replied. Then we both burst out laughing. After that we got on famously, and the F.O. was as disappointed for me as I was for myself when the first day's tour of inspection brought no chance of any game.

Nevertheless it was an interesting trip. There were interviews with road-makers, primitive men who were cutting out the side of a mountain to make a new motor road, and in each village there was a head man waiting with a list of complaints or petitions: small things that the F.O. settled in an easy confident manner that left the villagers happier and more content with their simple lot. A difference of one anna a day was an important affair to them. Every complaint or difficulty received even more care and attention than it seemed to deserve, and the F.O. insisted on inspecting even the smallest working camp of road-menders in the little huts they had built themselves. We saw the elephants at work in the young teak forests, but they were only clearing more land for teak. Convoys of bullock-carts loaded with teak and bound for the railway station down in the plains held us up on the narrow roads at intervals. The men driving the bullocks looked also to the F.O. for advice and assistance. We slept that night in a cheerful little bungalow all set round with beds of flaming cannas.

At dawn next morning an aged man came to the bungalow steps, and with many salaams informed the F.O. that during the night a tiger had killed a calf not far away. It had dragged the body nearly half a mile away to a lonely glade, and, according to tiger etiquette, had only nibbled the rump and ribs and then departed

in peace until the flesh was cold and twilight announced the time for a full evening meal. The F.O. sent a message to some of his rangers near and gave a number of instructions while we finished a leisurely breakfast of bacon and eggs. On the open veranda, with a view over miles of waving jungle to blue hills beyond, it was an epicure's feast.

The car took us as near as possible on the road where two enormous elephants awaited our pleasure. At a word from the mahout the animals knelt. One of the rangers twisted the tough tail into a loop for my benefit. With that as a step I scrambled up on the huge back. As we approached the kill my host selected the most suitable tree for a "machan" and natives swarmed up into its branches with wooden planks and teak boughs for the making and concealment of a "machan." When it was finished we both urged our elephants nearer. They stood with their great heads pressed against the trunk of the tree, while we scrambled up for a careful inspection. More boughs were added and any defects remedied. Then back we slid to the waiting heads of our elephants and into the car again.

Along tortuous roads we went that day, up to the hill villages, where the F.O. and I sat side by side in state, representatives of law and justice, and listened patiently to interminable arguments. For my part I had to be doubly patient, as I understood not a word of what went on. Each petitioner, however, amplified his case with excited pantomime that enabled me to follow some of the stories and kept me from falling asleep in my chair of state. We left the last village early in the forenoon, and prepared for the vigil of the night by an extra long siesta.

At last the time drew near. The rifles were carefully carried up into the machan by natives, and two white men scrambled up after them. We were well plastered with an anti-mosquito lotion that for once really lived

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up to its name, which was just as well, for after we had watched the elephants and the crowd of rangers and coolies depart, making plenty of noise in order to convince the tiger that they were really going away, we had to settle down to the complete silence and perfect immobility so vital to the success of our shooting.

It was agony—unable to smoke, unable to cough, unable to stretch or even to fidget ; but at last I noticed a tenseness in my companion that meant that his trained ears and eyes had warned him of something I still could not discern. A bird flew away. A monkey moved swiftly among the branches. Then down below us and to our right a blur of white moved. The light was fading fast and it was minutes before there was another movement. Until the tiger, if it was the tiger, moved, it blended so perfectly with the bushes and the leaf-covered ground that, strain our eyes as much as we could, we could not be sure that we had not imagined it. It was obviously suspicious of something. Ten minutes passed before it moved again, but at last we could see a ghostly form approaching the dead calf. A faint “tom-tom, tom-tom” from a distant village sounded again and again with an unreal quality that made it seem to come out of the very air. A few belated giant crows, common as sparrows in that part of India, flew noisily overhead on their way to their tree homes, and then all was quiet again, the dark, mysterious, all-pervading, sinister silence of the jungle. It swiftly became too dark to see anything at all. We could only wait for the moon, while below us the tiger could be heard crunching away at the unfortunate calf. At length a young moon rose above the tree-tops. Another quarter of an hour passed in silent stiffness until it was possible to distinguish objects. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the Forest Officer raise his double-barrelled rifle and motion me to get ready. Gently I raised my gun and peered cautiously through the branches. A slight

nod from my host—then I pulled the trigger. There was a thundering crash as the bullet flashed at a thousand feet a second and hit the tiger in the shoulder. There was one convulsive movement and the forest tyrant lay dead.

I stood up. The machan rocked as my stiff legs nearly threw me down again. The F.O. pulled me back. Carefully he pitched a couple of large stones at the still body, but there was no movement. The sleek terror would trouble the district no more. Slaughtered calves and human victims alike were avenged. A long "Coo-ee," from the F.O. brought the excited natives and the phlegmatic elephants back again. We clambered down the tree to where the natives crowded round his fallen majesty the tiger. They eagerly loaded the limp form on to one of the elephants to be taken back to the village to be skinned. Before that was done the next day, villagers from miles around came in crowds to see the dead body of the fierce terror that had made their lives a misery for months. The children pulled his tail and tweaked his whiskers, even the youngest being carried by their mothers to see the one enemy they must avoid at any cost.

I stayed on for the rest of a very interesting and exciting week. We sheltered in another machan through the whole of an incredibly beautiful moonlight night and saw the dawn over the tree-tops, but the panther for which we waited failed to return to his kill. Yet the memory of that night in the jungle will be with me when the tiger-shooting episode has been forgotten. The dawn, seen from that leafy jamum tree on the very top of a high plateau, was sufficient compensation for a cramped and sleepless night. When it came to parting, and I tried to express my gratitude to the F.O., he waved aside my thanks and was good enough to say that he wished I could stay longer. Once again in my vagabond travels I turned to further adventures with real regret at parting from the friends of the last one.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE IMMORTAL TAJ

I WAS still dreaming of tigers when the conductor banged on the compartment door and informed me that we were running into Agra. I groaned and turned over again, but I could hear the train running over some points, and Agra seemed suddenly very near. I looked at my watch which said 2.50 a.m. Sleepily I pulled my modest luggage together, rubbed my eyes again, shook half the dust of India from my clothes, and was nearly awake as we slid into the station. I crawled down from the carriage on to a moonlit platform and asked the night station-master the way to get to the Taj Mahal. That moment was one of the most haunted and unreal in all my existence. The moonlight gave to the deserted platform the quality of a dream, the Hindu station-master appeared from nowhere like the Genii of story and legend, and there was I, asking, as calmly and as unemotionally as if I were asking for the nearest bus-stop, for the Taj Mahal. For years I had been dreaming of the Taj, looking at pictures of the Taj, almost fearing to see its far-famed beauty in case it was a disappointment after all. Now I was standing on a moonlit platform hearing a turbaned and obsequious Hindu say that it was only three miles away. It was like an angel in a dream saying calmly that Heaven was just down the road.

In a few minutes he had woken up a tonga-driver and his steed, where they dozed in the shadow of the palace fort of Agra beneath the red sandstone of those mighty and mysterious walls. The little two-wheeled

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cart with its white pony galloped down the deserted streets and tree-lined lanes. With the pony's mane flying and hooves rattling the tonga seemed more like a Roman chariot rushing to battle than a vehicle that prosaically plied for hire in dusty streets. Jackals scurried across the road and into the moonlit fields. Their weird and melancholy wails followed us along the road until we passed through the outer wall and came to a steaming halt beside the main Taj gate. A clanking of heavy chains and bolts followed my anxious knocking. A small pass door, set in the formidable iron gateway, groaned as it swung open. I stepped in. A bowing attendant, awakened from his dreams, was still fastening his dhoti and the voluminous turban he had donned to do honour to the mad disturber of his peace. I was inside the Taj Mahal.

Out beyond the Persian arch stretched a long avenue of dark cypress trees and a silvery length of mirror water lit by moonlight. Towering at the end of the avenue was a faint and ghostly shape reflected in the shining water. The white marble shone dimly as though lit from within, and reality and reflection intermingled until a cloud passed over the face of the moon, when pale reality and shining reflection alike dissolved into space, leaving me staring foolishly, wondering again if I were dreaming. Then the cloud passed away, and the ivory towers swung back into life again, a beckoning mystery of ivory and stone framed against an incredible starlit sky. I moved almost without volition down the marble pavement, hardly aware of the fountains and the flowers. No sooner had I mounted the immense marble platform from which the tomb rose to the sky than I wished I were back again at the Persian gateway so that I could see again the ethereal loveliness of that first vision. I even moved to retrace my steps, but my turbaned guide, whose presence I had completely forgotten, touched my arm and motioned me to follow

him within the tomb. I had one glimpse of the dome rising in luminous beauty to its magnificent height in a masterful sweep. It seemed to be powdered with star-dust.

A single Persian lantern cast a soft glow on bas-reliefs of lotus flowers and on lacy marble screens. Beside the jewelled tomb of "Mumtaz Mahal," gem of the palace, and the tomb of Shah Jehan, who loved her so well, I stood a pilgrim. "Make it as beautiful as she was beautiful, make it in the image of her beauty," the grief-stricken Emperor had commanded. At the command of such a love the architect had worked inspired. The cold white stone of the sepulchre acquired a soul and feeling that two hundred years have only emphasized and beautified, until the Taj Mahal has the unique power of turning sight-seeing into a pilgrimage and interest into adoration. A perfectly proportioned monument of white marble, decorated exquisitely with delicate craftsmanship, glorified a love for which an Emperor sacrificed his wealth, his people and his freedom. At last he came to rest beside the one who inspired the most beautiful building in the world, a building "touched by the gods."

I borrowed a hand-lantern from the guide and alone I climbed the winding stone steps of one of the four minarets. It was dark and the bats flew around and ahead of me. Arrived at the little pavilion at the top I sat down and rested. A breeze, soft and warm, blew from the scented garden below. The dome was so near that I felt I could have embraced it had I stretched out my arms. Not until the moon faded and gave way to long streaks of golden light from the East was the spell broken. Then, serenaded by the distant cries of jackals, I descended to the sleepy garden. A sentinel owl hooted again and again. A large bat, or possibly a flying fox, fluttered past me in ungainly flight. On a marble bench I sat and saw the dawn bring the white

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stone miracle to life and colour again; as a rose and gold sky, tenderly beautiful, sent the first beams of light to rest on the dome of Taj Mahal I made quick pencil sketches and colour notes on some scraps of paper in my pocket, despairing all the time of ever reproducing or recalling a fraction of the beauty before me.

Then from the entrance came the sound of groaning iron as the great doors were swung laboriously back. I returned to the gate and shared an early breakfast of rice and fruit with the guards. The whole of that day I remained in the garden of the Taj, trying to etch into my memory its many beauties. Only at midnight, when the guards were closing the tower gates and belated stragglers were being "shoo'ed" through the Persian gate to the waiting "gharries," did I say farewell to the incomparable Taj Mahal. I had gone there doubting—I had even committed the crime of saying publicly that "perhaps I may not have time to see the Taj Mahal, and it's probably over-rated anyhow." I ate those rash words many times during the day and night I spent in the garden, and counted them blasphemy. As I left I bent low for one last glimpse through the outer gateway so that I could at least make amends by being able to say that I had seen the Taj in most of its changing moods. I wanted to carry away in my heart every shade of light, every trick that sun and moon and magic stone could play on human consciousness. I wanted some reflection of its loveliness to remain with me for ever. There was still one last view I craved, but that had to wait for the next day.

In striking contrast to the Taj was the massive stronghold of the old palace fort of Akbar. A mile in circumference, its tremendously thick red sandstone walls enclosed a maze of courtyards, gateways, mosques and halls. The audience halls and private chambers of the old Emperor were open to view. I saw the famous

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Pearl mosque, of white marble, one of the extravaganzas of that wild ruler and sublime lover, Shah Jehan, grandson of the great conqueror Akbar. The fort, standing on the banks of the Jumna river, had been the scene of tragedies and bloody fighting. In the Hall of Private Audience once stood the Peacock Throne on which the Mogul Emperors had sat. Six feet long and four feet wide, the throne was supported by six legs of solid gold. Above it, held aloft by twelve gold pillars, was a canopy of gold hung with pearls; between two golden peacocks studded with precious stones was a parrot carved from a single emerald. The throne, with many other beautiful objects, was carried away to Persia when Delhi was sacked. Only the guide's "Here stood the Peacock Throne" recalled its amazing beauty, unless imagination furnished the empty hall.

Down below were the dungeons. Near at hand flowed the river Jumna, the silent waters still keeping the secrets of those grim torture chambers as it kept them in the days when the bodies of unwanted slave-girls, criminals, and tortured enemies were committed to their care. I was glad to climb the worn steps again, to leave the musty atmosphere and to get back to the sunlight. I traipsed on in the wake of an aged official through empty echoing halls, peopling them as best I could with all the imagination at my disposal. At last we left the unlit corridors and climbed a high tower. We looked down from the marble battlements on to the arena where lions, tigers and elephants fought each other for the amusement of that amazing court. The guide pointed to the distance where the dome of incomparable Taj Mahal shone in the sunlight.

"Is this the Jasmine Tower?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied.

So the place on which we stood was the very spot to which the dying Shah had been carried at his last

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request. Propped up in the arms of his favourite daughter he had looked across the slow-moving Jumna river at his masterpiece. His follies are now forgotten, his crimes excused. He died, but lives on for ever as the man who decreed that the Taj Mahal should be built. "Make it the image and soul of her beauty," he had commanded. The bitterness of death had been forgotten as he gazed for the last time upon the divinely beautiful resting-place he had conceived for her he loved. Now they lie together, side by side.

I look my last look at the Taj Mahal from the same balcony.

"I am ready to go now," I said at last.

We went down into the crowded streets, but I saw only the Taj Mahal, and my thoughts were still with Mumtaz Mahal and Shah Jehan.

CHAPTER XXIV

TWO'S COMPANY

A SURPRISE awaited me at the hotel. A very pleasant surprise it was, too. Nothing less than a made-to-order comrade. Frank Farley, a Yale graduate vagabonding for a year in the East before settling down to a teaching job, had heard that another American was doing the same thing and had come straight across from his hotel to spy out the land. It was not very long before we decided to join forces. I needed some moral support in "doing" India on the cheap and it would be a very pleasant change to have someone to share the fun with. Frank was twenty-two but his enthusiasms were undimmed, and his youthful appearance and charming smile were to prove very helpful in lots of emergencies. Years before I had started on my travels I had thought to take a companion with me. On a sheet of paper I had set down, rather priggishly and solemnly, the qualities that should be combined in such a companion.

1. He must be as good a walker as myself, yet he must not be a better walker than I am.
2. He must be able to talk but he must also be able to keep quiet.
3. He must not quarrel with me: that would be too unpleasant; yet he must not agree with me: that would be too tame.
4. He should be able to take responsibilities but not be "bossy."
5. He should not be afraid of difficulties or even dangers, but should not be reckless or take undue risks.

The list went on for a dozen or more characteristics. No one man could have filled all the demands, yet for such a trip as I proposed a good many of the points were vital and yet were surprisingly rare. It sounds a bit sententious, but it wasn't really so. I went alone in the end.

It was unfortunate that I had come so near to journey's end before I found someone who came nearer to fulfilling all my ideas of a real comrade that I had believed it possible for anyone to do. I must make it clear that not for one moment did I think, when I made out that ideal list, that I possessed all those attributes myself. I was merely selfishly considering the ideal companion for me.

Once we had decided to join forces, Frank and I did not waste any time. We hired bicycles and rode out to Fatehpur-Sikri, the incomparable city of red sandstone twenty-three miles away. The roads were shaded by great trees planted with wonderful forethought by a Moghul Emperor, who was thinking of marching troops and not of tired people or cycling vagabonds. Frank told me the story of the building of the city by the mighty Akbar in 1568.

"Akbar was a sad king in that year. He had lost his two sons and was fearful that he would die without an heir. To a Mohammedan hermit who claimed miraculous powers the King revealed his dearest wishes. The old man advised Akbar to send his queen to live in the hermit's stone hut at Sikri, then a bare mountain of rock."

"Sounds a bit trusting to me," I interrupted. "Did the queen get the desired heir?"

"Akbar got his son and heir less than a year later," continued Fawley, "a boy who became the father of your beloved Shah Jehan. The proud Akbar built a city on the spot and the bare mountain provided stone for the amber city of Fatehpur-Sikri."

We left our bicycles and entered the city by the gateway of Victory, the tallest gate in all India. But it was a dead city. We wandered through the polished corridors; descended into the crypts; climbed upon the very roof-tops and gazed out over a deserted countryside; but the vast walls, twenty miles in circumference, contained no life. It was an empty shell. We saw the Emperor's bathrooms, but no water ran. We stood beside the octagonal pillar, the top of which constituted the platform from which Akbar and those visiting royalties he desired to impress, played chess with living pieces by giving commands to lovely slave-girls standing on the squares of black and white marble below. It was there, too, that Akbar held midnight conversations with Sadhu, and there that he sat in regal robes to receive ambassadors and to pass sentences of life and death.

We sat on that slab of regal marble and reminded each other of the story of the cook who tried to poison the King. Akbar had her tied between two bent-over trees, a leg to each. Then the trees were released. The grim dungeons below had their own stories too. More cheerfully, too, we talked of the days when the magic notes of Indian flutes drifted over the wonderful gardens. When the Emperor, in a golden carriage drawn by gaily-caparisoned elephants, was announced by trumpeters and followed along the causeway by a vast and glittering crowd of courtiers and soldiers. We wandered through the Wind Palace, a latticed-windowed retreat where Akbar and his ladies reclined languorously on silken couches beneath the stars on warmer nights. We saw a spout, a marvellous piece of carved marble in the form of a tiger's head, which once gushed rose-water, and we wondered how it was pumped up, and how life really went on when those marble floors were peopled with courtiers and slaves and soldiers, and where the kitchens were, and if they had ice-boxes, or

suffered from the mosquitoes! Our questions echoed down empty corridors and the echoes answered with more questions which we could not answer.

We pedalled silently through the soft misty moonlight back to Agra. The plains were alive with a thousand jackals. Sometimes their reddish bodies raced with us along the road. Sometimes they slunk across the road as we passed. We listened to their melancholy wail while the trees overhead made fascinating patterns on the road as the moon shone through the leaves.

Delhi, our next goal, the ancient capital and present capital of India, was four hours' train journey away. With Frank to keep me "in face," I suggested that we went third-class with the low-caste natives. Certainly it wasn't "done," but it promised to be interesting and it undoubtedly suited our pockets. Undaunted by all that we had heard of difficulties and even dangers, we crowded into a third-class car. The flat wooden seats and benches were packed and the corridors piled with all kinds of baggage, from sewing-machines to baskets of fruit for market. It looked as though we had four hours' standing in front of us, until an old Hindu motioned us to use as seats two sacks of grain he was taking to Delhi, and very comfortable seats they proved to be—much better than wooden benches.

Frank, with the luck his charm deserved, was soon engrossed in a flirtation with a delightful little Hindu girl of eleven. She looked like a princess in her rainbow-coloured dress. Hindu poets, who sang of "little lotus blossoms," were quite right. Judged by any standard of beauty, that little girl, with her soft, deep, innocent eyes, glistening black hair and fine features, was exquisite. She laughed and hid her head beneath a yellow scarf as she caught sight of Frank's disarming smile, and they were soon playing a happy game of bo-peep, to the vast amusement of the girl's mother and of the whole carriage.

I was not so fortunate. A small boy climbed backwards and forwards over my legs in the old school-room trick of "Teacher, may I leave the room?" Twice he brought back a cup of water, some of which he managed to spill on me each time. Still, it was all good fun, and the four hours soon passed. Frank said good-bye to his new love. I had my moment, too. A last laughing backward glance, a flourish of a jewelled arm, a flash of colour . . . and the little princess was lost to view in the city crowd.

We soon hired two more bicycles and settled down in a most delightful and remarkably cheap little hotel. The bicycles were a god-send, as everything we wanted most to see was some distance out of Delhi. First we rode down to the shopping centre at Connaught Place and bought a few necessary replacements of clothes and oddments. Our knapsacks and travel-worn appearance caused excitement and some raising of lorgnettes in carriages and "posh" rickshaws, but we did not care. We aroused the same interest in the native bazaars within the walls of Old Delhi, but it was a very friendly curiosity, and we did not fail to notice the difference between that and the supercilious stares of the main streets of New Delhi. I loved particularly the streets of the dye-workers. Long banners of freshly-dyed cloth, of hues vivid enough to put the palette of an artist to shame, were hanging from balconies in great sheets of lemon-yellow, alloverian red and emerald green. In one shop the whole family, from the old grandfather mixing dye in a huge brass cauldron to the latest infant sitting open mouthed in the middle of all the activity, were busy dyeing native cloth. Small boys took lengths of gaudy cloth and walked up and down the streets waving the long strips in the air to dry.

Makers of hubble-bubble water-pipes squatted in little stalls. With one hand they worked the bow that turned the lathe, while the other hand held the chisel handle,

the chisel itself being directed by prehensile toes. Some of the streets were mere alleys crowded with people and with camels and donkeys loaded with rugs and blankets from the hills of Northern India. Sacred bulls and riding cows wandered almost at will. Mohammedan women in voluminous skirts walked past with graceful carriage and the jingle of silver jewellery.

Down one street came a small Indian boy of about eight carrying two enormous fish. He was wearing a pair of pyjama pants with considerable pride, and was very concerned about the preservation of his modesty. That other small boys round him could not boast a pair of pants to the dozen did not affect his problem or his attitude. His particular trouble was the law of gravity. Pyjama trousers, especially when rather too big, have a playful habit of slipping down. Having no string, he was normally content to preserve his dignity by holding them up, but, with two slippery fish to carry, that presented difficulties. The trousers fell down and snared his feet. The gentle breezes played round his undraped form as he stood in thought for a moment. With the total collapse of his modesty there seemed to be no object in temporary measures. The obvious thing to do was not only to correct the present position, but to prevent its recurrence. He tried to transfer one of the fishes so that he could hold both in one hand, leaving the other free for experiments, but an eight-year-old hand lacked the necessary spread to hold two large fish.

With a decision that would have done credit to a much older mind, he laid both fish down on the grimy pavement, seized the trousers with both hands and struggled back into them. Then he leant over to pick up the fish, and the pants fell off again—some puzzles defy scientific solution. A less determined boy might have called for help or abandoned the fish to the army of hump-tailed cats that had appeared from nowhere

and were showing an embarrassing interest in the proceedings. This lad was no weakling, even if he was at the great disadvantage of being minus his pants, man's weakest moment. He tried all over again, and finished with the trousers round his ankles. He might have gone on trying for the rest of the day, with the incredible patience of the East, but Frank detached a strap from one of our boxes and sent me to the rescue. A flash of white teeth recorded the boy's thanks as he disappeared down the alley. The disappointed cats yawned and went back to wherever Indian cats do go. The grave situation was solved.

Down the street came the beginning of a wedding procession—two men playing on dented cornets and several enthusiastic drummers. Behind them came the bridegroom, dressed in bright yellow jacket, white jodhpurs and a wreath of flowers and mounted on a dappled pony. Beside him rode the father holding a younger brother, the best man, in his arms. The minute bridegroom passed by with the impassive sleepy stare of six or seven summers, looking as though he would rather be asleep in bed than out being married. A tonga-cart followed, packed with the female members of the family, the curtains closely drawn. Some twenty women brought up the rear, carrying on their heads earthenware pots of sweetmeats for the household of the little Mohammedan bride. Clowns and jugglers amused the crowd and gave a special little show for the white sahibs, collecting a few annas on the way. After the ceremony the little bridegroom would return to his own home until he was eighteen or nineteen, when he would meet his little bride again.

Our happy home, the Alexandra Hotel, was located on the outskirts of a large compound. My room was at the back, on the ground floor, and became a repository for the bones brought in by two friendly mongrel pups. These two attached themselves to me,

and seemed determined to see that I had a proper balance of bone in my diet. They used to wake me at sunrise. When I took a borrowed bridge-table out to the shade beneath the spreading branches of a mango tree, in the hope of making up arrears of writing and sketching, the pups followed me and slept beneath the table or below my chair. Frank came down one morning to find us all settled down together.

"I see you have adopted most of India's mongrel pups," he said.

"Quite right, old boy, quite right! The girls like you, but the pups like me best. And that, in the opinion of Socrates, is a much safer course for a young man, especially if the young man has the wanderlust."

I was content to let Frank outshine me in that particular direction, although I must in fairness state that his greatest successes were with children like the little princess in the train.

He was more interested in a lively little mongoose than in the pups that had adopted me. The mongoose was a dapper little gentleman in a silver grey coat, who had adopted the compound and the whole hotel. He was most welcome, his nervous nose having cleared the whole place of cobras. The ordinary Indian cobra is a friendly snake and likes to live near man, but unfortunately if he is alarmed or trodden on he reacts immediately, and the result is the same as if he were not at all friendly.

Of course we took a sunrise excursion to see the famous Kartub Tower, riding the seven miles in cool darkness. The great height of the tower and its odd shape make it the first of the Delhi sights, to be seen by every visitor. From the top of the two hundred and seventy foot column of Victory erected by early Moslem conquerors, we looked across at the seven ruins of the seven capitals of the seven empires that have risen on that plain. There is a tradition that there would be nine Delhis in the history of India, and then

something would happen, only I could not find out what really was supposed to happen then—the millennium or obliteration. The English had taken a chance and had built an eighth capital at a cost of about twenty-five million pounds. A little prejudiced by our supercilious reception by the “pukka Sahibs,” we cycled over the eighth capital to see how it compared with the monuments that remained of the earlier cities. We were impressed. The Viceroy’s House was the centre-piece and stood on a platform. The Council House on one side and immense administrative buildings on the other, flanked its imposing approaches. Where the Moghuls had built of marble for beauty only, the English had, through the finest work of that great architect, Lutyens, endeavoured to make useful buildings beautiful. All the buildings were white sandstone on red sandstone bases. The tall column with the Star of India glittering in the sunshine, the beautifully designed doorways and gateways, and the perfect proportions of the whole, rivalled the charm and beauty of the Moghul masterpieces—always excepting the Taj Mahal, of course. The gardens, however, were amazing. Marble watercourses, immense rectangular-shaped pools of placid water, splashing fountains and dewy lawns, together with acres of roses, pinks, sweet peas and hundreds of beds of fragrant flowers of all kinds, softened the austere splendour and rigid formality to a real beauty. By moonlight it was a flood-lit fairyland in which we were allowed to wander by the kindness of a friendly A.D.C. Our prejudices faded away.

We stayed some days waiting for letters that didn’t come. Their absence left us both with a regrettable need for economy, which was not quite so depressing when there were two of us to share the hardships. We both decided to push on, whatever came.

“Let’s go on to Srinigar and have a look at the Himalayas,” said Frank.

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It sounded good to me, but how could we do it? It was a long way.

"Well, I'm game to ride third-class again."

"I should think you would be," I retorted, "with memories of your last flirtation. There might not be a princess on this train."

"You know, I have an aviator friend there, Ed McDonald. He works for the Government, and I'm sure he could put us up. He might even fly us up to some of the peaks."

"Gee, Frank, look at this map. If we get up to Srinigar we're only about two hundred miles from the country of Ladakh. See, here, along the Tibetan border."

"So what?" said Frank.

"Well, only twelve visitors a year are allowed, but it's really no place for you. It is one of the few places in the world where women have more than one husband. In Ladakh some of the women have six husbands. Polyandry is very much in vogue, or so I'm told."

"And do you think we could get up to this polyandry country?"

"Absolutely! There is a pack trail from Srinigar used by the Tibetans and their donkeys. A friend of mine made the trip three years ago."

"Well, we could do with a bit of adventure after the peaceful time we've had lately," said Frank with a characteristic smile.

The train was almost empty of passengers, and we travelled at ease if not in comfort. Whenever the scenery was not particularly interesting we studied the map of Northern India and planned a trip to Peshawar and the Khyber Pass, and, if possible, to Kabul, when we had seen the Vale of Kashmir and distant Ladakh. At last my attention was attracted by a line of fleecy clouds to the north.

"Those are queer clouds, Frank," I said as I pointed them out.

"Clouds?" he shouted in excitement. "Those aren't clouds! They're the Himalayas. Oh, boy, oh, boy, look at them!"

As we watched they gradually assumed more definite outlines, the shapes of the snow-topped peaks of the Western Himalayas, the southern edge of the mighty escarpment that guarded the approach to Tibet and the Roof of the World. Twenty thousand feet and more in the air, they broke the sky-line as far as eye could see.

"Which do we take to look up your friend, Ed," I asked, "a tonga or a gondola?"

There was a great ring of natives at the station offering various kinds of transport. We remembered in time that Srinigar rivalled Venice for its bridges and waterways, so we chose a gondola and chose wisely. It was a gay gondola, cushioned in green cretonne. We glided along like lords, like millionaires, like anything except the couple of khaki-clad travel-stained vagabonds we were, sore from wooden seats and dry from train dust. Through tunnels of green from the overhanging walnut trees we glided. A graceful grove of dark-green pines silhouetted against the dazzling white of snow-clad Himalayas made us call a halt and made me reach for my sketching-block. On again, we passed under a bridge and met a whole fleet of graceful gondolas. We were in Venice, even if it was a rather tumbledown replica of the real Venice. It was picturesque enough. We changed regretfully to a prancing tonga that took us out to the small airfield where we hoped to find Ed McDonald. He was at work on a 'plane when we arrived, and climbed down to greet us, looking fit and well in a worn suit of mechanic's overalls.

"Hullo, Ed! I want you to meet a friend of mine, Carl Shreve, artist and vagabond extraordinary!" laughed Frank.

"Don't take him seriously, Ed, he's getting back at me for some of the tricks I've played on him lately."

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After we had been most hospitably entertained, we discussed plans.

"So you fellows think of going up to Ladakh by way of Kashmir? That's some trip. You say it's only two hundred miles, but you have got to cross three mountain ranges and a fourteen-thousand-foot pass, on trails that only sure-footed donkeys can climb."

"Why not?" said Frank. "We should make it in three weeks."

"You know," said Ed, "I've got a week's leave due, and I wouldn't mind seeing that country. Supposing we split the expenses three ways and fly 'Jenny Lind' there?"

"What!" Frank and I exclaimed together, "you would fly us there?"

"Sure, in a day or two when I've been over the 'bus thoroughly. You'd better get some sheepskin coats and good boots."

Ed refused our amateur assistance with the 'plane, so we had three delightful dreaming days on the Jhelum river. We hired a house-boat by the day at four rupees a time for each. For that modest outlay we had a completely furnished boat with servants, meals and exquisite comfort day and night. Ed joined us in the evenings, and we usually rowed along to the gates of Shalimar, famous in the Kashmiti songs of Laurence Hope:

"Pale hands I loved beside the Shalimar!

Where are they now?

Where are they now?"

We rode in cushioned ease on the lotus-covered lake to the marble shores of that lovely garden, while the sensuous night was hung with heavy perfumes. The splashing of the fountains made music enough to accompany us back across the moonlit lake to the willow-hung spot where we tied up. There we were

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rocked to sleep, a million stars hanging in the heavens above us, the gentle lapping of water for our lullaby.

The dial was registering fifteen thousand feet as I peered over Ed's shoulder at the instrument board of his cabin 'plane. The trusty Fokker engine was roaring. It was in striking contrast to our silent gondola of the night before. Instead of open necks and bare knees, we were huddled up in sheepskins until we looked like Teddy bears.

Below us the snowy pinnacles of the Himalayas stretched for hundreds of miles across Kashmir and Tibet. Dark and forbidding canyons, with sheer rock sides, showed up vividly as the sun broke through and lit up the interminable snowy peaks. Below us, too, was the icy and slippery trail we had so light-heartedly essayed to cross on foot, or at best on donkeys. I certainly had not expected to see so much snow.

Ed yelled into my ear above the roar of the motor, "We may have trouble landing at Leh, but if it's impossible we'll just have to fly back and call it a day."

Three and a half hours' of very bumpy flying found us circling above the little town of Leh, half lost in the enormous expanse of the Himalayas. About a mile to the east was a small gravel plateau, blown bare of snow by the wind. Ed circled the plateau several times. It wasn't exactly an ideal landing place, but at last he seemed satisfied and brought "Jenny Lind" down safely after a few exciting bumps.

"Well, here we are, boys," said a very pleased Ed. "The highest town in the world awaits your pleasure."

Most of the male population had come out to meet us, dressed in padded clothes of grey wool so dirty that our sheepskins looked positively brilliant in comparison. Silver earrings and gaudy necklaces adorned many of them, but the ingrained dirt of years marred the effect. It rather spoilt our welcome to find that the Ladakhis were very much more interested in "Jenny

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Lind" than in us. White visitors were rare, but not unknown. Visiting aeroplanes were an entirely new factor. Willing volunteers helped to fasten the 'plane down and two enthusiastic Ladakhis promised to guard it. We weren't sure that souvenir-hunters were as scarce as the autograph-hunters seemed to be.

Our first search was for someone who could speak English. We eventually succeeded in finding a Russian merchant who not only served us with food and tea, which we took in his shop, sitting on boxes, to the interest of the crowd outside, but who himself broached the interesting subject of polyandry. After all, we could hardly go round asking women how many husbands they had, or, worse still, ask any of the men how many shares they had in a wife. Apparently the custom, originally introduced as a form of birth-control, was dying out. Younger brothers went off and got wives for themselves. The idea was that when a woman married, she not only married the man but all his brothers as well. Amazingly enough, it worked out well in practice. Most of the men are away with the flocks for long periods, and the one left behind placed his shoes outside the door as a sign of possession. The eldest brother had the first choice, and his shoes could supplant other shoes, but only he had that power. In the case of the other brothers, the shoes were the inviolable symbol of their temporary possession. The children belonged to all, but the eldest brother was finally responsible for the whole lot.

We were able, by the kind introduction of the Russian, to meet a wife and three of her five husbands, not to mention seven of somebody's children. The other husbands were away. They certainly seemed happy enough, and invited us to a meal, or, rather, to a solemn tea-drinking, at which they were the spectators and we were some kind of curious performers. The wife was rich, judging by Ladakhi standards. That meant that

the strip of leather which ornamented her forehead, and which reached down behind her head to below her waist, was profusely studded with graduated rows of turquoises. The wealth of a family and of generations back consisted solely of their flocks and herds and the stored wealth of those remarkable turquoise head-dresses. Many of the younger women were very pretty, but as Ed and I teased Frank, they were a bit too dirty and greasy for a Yale graduate. It certainly seemed as though both men and women were sewn into their clothes and left in them until the clothes fell off.

The inhabitants of a Lama monastery, even higher up the hillside, came down to see the wonderful "bird" and invited us to spend the night with them. Ladakh, like all of Tibet, clings amazingly to the Lama form of the Buddhist faith, with all the consequences I had noticed in Urga. The monks were very good to us, however, and we would have stayed longer than the two nights, but that Ed feared for the safety of his plane tethered in that barren spot.

So it was farewell to red-robed monks and polyandry alike. The whole town co-operated in rock-removing to make our take-off easier. It was a difficult business in that thin air. We circled the plateau and waved, then headed back along the Kashmir valley. Ed was sporting enough to land us neatly on the plain, surrounded by mountains, which holds Peshawar, instead of dropping us at Srinigar again. Then it was good-bye to a good friend and a good aviator, and on to Khyber.

CHAPTER XXV

FROM JAIL TO CHELSEA

IN that select group of "famous sights" which succeed in impressing the most blasé traveller, however forewarned he may be, or however prepared for disillusionment, the Khyber Pass stands high.

It should be exciting enough. There is not a pass in the world so filled with the ghosts of battles, so red with the blood of warring nations, so charged with history. For over a century the English have held the Pass, at war with the wild Afghan tribes for most of that time. On their side the Afghans have guarded their independence so jealously that it is almost impossible for a white man to cross that border. North of Peshawar there is a barbed wire barrier on the road overlooked by Jamrud Fort. Near the barrier is a huge compound enclosed in thick mud walls. This is the "serai" where the caravans rest for the night before they go into or come out of the Khyber. Its twenty-mile length of road is only open during the daylight hours, and is only really safe, even with an armed escort, on two days of the week.

Under what must be one of the strangest agreements ever made, the tribesmen have agreed neither to snipe or to rob on Tuesdays and Fridays. At the Afghan end of the Pass is another "serai," where men and animals wait for the "convoy days," as they are called, when goods from both ends pour through.

Ed dropped us at Peshawar on a Wednesday, and we spent the night in a dak-bungalow run under Government auspices. Before he left he put in a good word

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for us with an officer friend of his. The officer passed the word along so effectively that all kinds of assistance was forthcoming. A high-up official sent a message offering us a lift in his car to Landi Kotal. We entered the Pass in state, although I must admit that our host looked a bit askance at our outfit at first. He became quite human when he heard some of our story.

We started very early to avoid the blistering heat of the day. Every few miles there was a parade-ground, where Indian soldiers were being drilled by English officers. We ran steadily through rocky defiles between small villages, each less than a mile long, where the pass spread out to four or five hundred feet. There was a railway and two roads through the Pass. The railway ran along the mountainous side of the Pass in a series of loops and tunnels. One road was reserved for military and motor traffic, the other for caravans. Wherever the two roads crossed, signposts—clear to the densest or most illiterate native—showed a silhouette of a motor car for the motor road, and a cut-out of a camel and a donkey for the other. We passed one caravan. Each ungainly camel was tied by the nose to the camel in front. Great bales of merchandise swayed dangerously with the swinging gait of the long-legged beasts. The drivers slouched along beside them, while at the front and the rear of the caravan marched armed Khassadars, local tribesmen who were the paid guardians of the road. These men also garrisoned the small stone fortresses that looked down every mile or so on the road from the wild hills above.

A Union Jack came in sight, standing stiffly out in a welcome breeze. We had reached the barbed wire and the sentries of Landi Kotal where the fortified Afridi villages were clustered around a British fort. We were through the Khyber Pass, but the Afghanistan border was still four miles away and the sun was blazing down. Our luck still held, however. The official in

whose car we had travelled introduced us to the officers at Landi Kotal. They invited us into the office and gave us drinks and permission to go on to Landi Kana, the actual border, then handed us over to a junior officer. He was a very bright young fellow and insisted that we should return to tiffin with him, and ordered out an army truck and an escort to the border—all for us. If we had felt like millionaires or lords in a Srinigar gondola, we certainly felt that we were "Very Important People" in Landi Kotal.

We drove out with an escort of Sikh Lancers and the salute of the guard. The power of our original introduction seemed to grow every time we used it. We were passed from hand to hand like Exhibits A and B, but we were better treated each time. Our truck arrived with only a motor-cycle escort, as it was too hot for cavalry to ride fast, but we were received in state. We rolled in between barbed-wire entanglements. The sentry called out the guard to present arms. A young officer came out and greeted us with great friendliness. Cool drinks appeared as if by magic and were very welcome after the shimmering heat of that winding road between the sun-scorched rocks. The plains of Afghanistan stretched before us along the magic road to Kabul that was trebly barred to us—by a British guard, an Afghan guard, and the spectacular notice that shouted:

"IT IS ABSOLUTELY FORBIDDEN TO CROSS THE BORDER INTO AFGHAN TERRITORY."

As if in answer to our longing looks, the officer smiled and said a few words to an Indian orderly. Under his guidance we were allowed to cross, at a less provocative place, for about a hundred yards into the forbidden territory—just to say we had been in Afghanistan.

Our amazing luck still continued. There was a Pathan dancing troupe booked to give a performance

to the garrison troops that night. Would we care to stay? Would we? A 'phone call to Landi Kotal put things in order, and we stayed on, feeling, as civilians, almost like aliens in the rigid bugle-bound military outpost.

It was fascinating, like a story-book come to life, but somehow most utterly impressive in its simplicity and single-mindedness. The flag flying above the fort became a reality instead of a symbol. Had I been English I should have swelled with pride or emotion or something—only of course, had I been English, I shouldn't have done anything of the sort.

The dancing was amazing. A great circle of troops were clustered around a lamp-lit space in the centre of the fort. The officers and our humble selves were seated at one point on the circumference. A deferential turbaned orderly offered and lit cigarettes for us, then stood back, impassive as a statue, as the dancers entered the circle. A drum and fife orchestra shrilled into wild music as the men advanced in a barbaric sword dance. No sooner had one dance ended than another, even wilder, was begun. A troupe of three girls, with many coloured skirts, whirled like tops into a crescendo of spinning that brought the watching troops, British and Indian alike, to their feet in yelling applause. The "girls" I discovered later were really boys, as the strict Moslems could not have tolerated women dancing, but I had to be told or I should have remained in ignorance of the fact. The officers withdrew about one o'clock, but gave Frank and me permission to stay to the end if we wished. We did wish, and it was 3.30 a.m. before we crept, satisfied, to our little camp cots.

An army truck, complete with machine gun, rushed us back through the Pass to Peshawar, and once again we were back on our own resources, with very few rupees between us and hundreds of miles to Bombay and letters and the next stage. There was nothing for it but the mail train, and third class at that.

FROM JAIL TO CHELSEA

We arrived at the station, hoping that none of our military friends would be there to catch us in the act of "going native," but when we saw the platform we knew that no one could see us. The noise was deafening and movement was difficult, as most of *our* fellow passengers were camping out, on and among great bundles of household goods. It was interesting enough. There were fierce hook-nosed Pathans, carrying rifles and wearing cartridge belts; there were Afridis from the hills; Hindus, Sikhs, Wazirs, Kashmiris and Tamils, every kind and variety of India's teeming millions. And all wanting *our* train. A baby slept peacefully in the midst of babel and uproar. We got in the train, but that was all. The thought of spending hour after hour in that crowded corridor amidst dust, heat and sprawling humanity began to be intolerable. Frank said "This won't do. I'm going to explore." He came back to report a full train everywhere except one place. "There is a compartment where the railroad Government police ride. You wait here. Maybe I can fix it." He came back after ten minutes' absence and rescued me. His charm had worked a miracle. We spent a comfortable night in a compartment all to ourselves next door to the guardians of peace, who slept in what looked like a small arsenal.

During the night a prisoner was brought in, heavily chained, and bumped down beside us. I awoke to the noise, and then realised what had happened. We were sleeping in a travelling jail!

"Somehow a fitting end to our cheerful association," said Frank, as the train drew in to Bombay. We had to part. He to return to a teaching post in China, I to travel on alone. But my vagabond days were over too. Letters in Bombay not only provided me with much-needed funds but contained offers of two jobs in London—a six months' contract with a shipping firm for painting pictures for travel posters, and a more per-

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manent position with a leading English magazine for painting their magazine covers. My editor in Canada had sent his last remittances. I had seen much of the colourful world I always dreamt of. From a jail in Mongolia to a jail in India seemed to have rounded off a journey that had enabled me to fulfil many life-long ambitions and cherished hopes. A flat in Chelsea called me. Into a brand-new case went khaki shorts and shirt and heavy boots, souvenirs of happy days : all that remained, except memories, to remind me of difficulties overcome, of friends made, of experience gained, of all that goes to make the thrills and joys of Distant Horizons.

FINIS

